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J. SIDLOW BAXTER



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DEDICATION

With deep esteem this chain of Bible studies is dedicated to
MRS NADINE WARNER STRONG, M.A.,
wife of the late beloved Reverend Professor John Henry Strong; in
expression of thankfulness to God for her long, gifted, faithful ministry of
Bible-teaching, in colleges, groups and classes, through the years, with
imperishable impression upon her students, not a few of whom are now in
full-time Christian service around the world, and all of whom thank God
upon every remembrance of her.

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FOREWORD

I HAVE entitled this book, “The Strategic Grasp of the Bible”, and my hope is that those who read it will concur that I have done so with ample justification. That word, “strategic”, is primarily a military term (from the Greek *strategos*, a general). It has to do with generalship, or the science and art of conducting a campaign. It carries with it the thought of “sizing up” a situation, perceiving the determining factors in it, and seizing the points of vantage so as to achieve success.

In our study of the Bible we need a perspective alertness to those critical factors, figures, pronouncements, turning-points, which have a pivotal or crucial relationship to the rest of written revelation; so that by recognizing their strategic importance we may the more ably “grasp” the message of the Bible as a whole, and the more effectively “get it over” to the people of our own day.

I cannot hope to carry with me all who may chance to scan the following pages. In these days when the officialdoms of our major Protestant denominations seem chaotically irregular in their attitude to the inspiration and authority of the Bible, views are so varied, and unevangelical prejudices so deep, that a book such as this can seem like an ebullition of old-fashioned naivete to some, especially to a certain ilk of theological liberals who are so modernly intellectual that they can believe anything rather than the older view of the Bible.

Especially in Britain, these days, when one glories in the plenary inspiration of the Bible there is the clinging feeling of being “a voice crying in the wilderness”. Yet it was the older view of the Bible, more than all else, which lifted Britain to a leadership and glory which were conspicuous at the beginning of our twentieth century, but which now, alas, have pathetically deteriorated. The liberalist view of the Bible has done nothing for Britannia but weaken and befuddle her. When will the eyes of leaders and people be

opened to see this? When will there be another generation of New Testament prophets who will preach the Bible again with the old-fashioned but reverently intellectual certitude of the famous Britishers, Spurgeon and Parker and Liddon and MacLaren and General Booth? Britain might even yet recover some moral leadership if her princes and prophets and people were to bow again before the Bible as the inspired and all-commanding Word of God.

I have always advocated unfettered, individual freedom in the interpretation of the Bible. With every fibre of conviction I subscribe to that original Protestant tenet, “the right and duty of private interpretation”. That liberty has resulted in a basic doctrinal unanimity of free men which is a distinguishing merit of Protestant Christianity, and is infinitely preferable to the Roman church’s dictatorial imposition of ecclesiastical dogma upon a hitherto gagged laity. The sorry-looking internecine disunity of latter-day Protestantism is not due to freedom in the *interpretation* of the Bible, but to a breakdown of belief in the *inspiration* of the Bible. Until more recent times, among the main bodies of Protestant Christendom, there was a healthful “diversity in unity”; a useful denominational diversity on matters non-fundamental, going with a recognised oneness of conviction as to the Bible itself and the foundation truths of the evangelical faith. The deadly disruptions of today are due to the rationalistic spoliation of the Bible by the German-originated “higher critics” and their successors, issuing in the “New Theology”, then “Liberalism”, and then “Neo-Orthodoxy”. Much as I believe in freedom of interpretation, I aver that Protestant Christianity in general will never regain its lost initiative and dynamic force until there is a re-avowed *unity of conviction* that the Bible, solely and wholly, is the plenarily inspired, inerrant, and utterly authoritative *Word of God*.

I am not forgetting the “seven thousand” in Britain who have not “bowed the knee to Baal”, nor the millions of enthusiastic evangelical scholars, ministers, and church members in U.S.A. and Canada, not to mention other parts of the English-speaking world. Among *them*, at least, a book like this can still find a welcome, and may possibly exercise a useful ministry even though its circulation may not be unusually extensive. That the following pages may indeed have such a ministry is the author’s sincere desire, to the praise of Him “whom, having not seen, we love”.

PART ONE

MAINLY ARCHITECTURAL

FIRST, A RIGHT APPROACH

Away back on June 17th, 1843, Daniel Webster, one of the weightiest thinkers and possibly the finest orator America ever produced, delivered a stirring speech at the completion of the Bunker Hill Monument. Referring to the Pilgrim Fathers and the Bible, he said, “They brought with them a full portion of the riches of the past, in science, art, morals, religion and literature. *The Bible came with them.* The Bible is a book of faith and a book of doctrine; it teaches man his own responsibility, his own dignity, and his equality with his fellow man. . . . I believe that the Bible is to be understood and received in the plain obvious meaning of its passages, since I cannot persuade myself that a book intended for the instruction and conversion of the whole world should cover its meaning in any such mystery and doubt that none but critics and philosophers can discover it.”

FIRST, A RIGHT APPROACH

WE are to think together, in this series of studies, about the presence and the marvel of structural design in the Bible. As a preliminary, it is needful to make certain observations regarding the right way of approach to such a subject.

Without a doubt, what people *see* in the Bible is largely determined by what they *believe* about it. Persons whose ideas of its inspiration are loose or feeble will neither find nor even expect to find in it many of those inner evidences and characteristics of supernatural design which are the continual discovery and delight of readers to whom the Bible is the uniquely and plenarily inspired Word of God.

That is no argument against the Bible. Nor is it putting the Bible at the mercy of the reader. It is not saying that the Bible means one thing to one reader and another thing to another reader, or that it can be made to mean anything to anybody. It is not saying (as I heard a preacher say about the Old Testament) that it simply means what you make it to mean. The Bible uses plain language, and uses it with the normal sense attaching to the words. Speaking of it in general, it has one fixed meaning for all readers alike, and can mean only the one thing to all who read it with open mind.

There is absolutely nothing of the clandestine about Christianity. From its periphery to its centre it is frank and open—open as a cloudless dawn-break; open as the hill-tops against the cerulean canopy of the sky; open as the purest light of day. Its characteristic word is “whosoever”. When its first evangelists went through the Roman Empire long ago its openness created an immediate contrast with the old-time mystery cults of Cybele and Ottis, the Asian Isis and Serapis, and the Persian Mithras. It is the same today. Christianity has no kinship of spirit with covert orders like some in vogue today, bound by secret oaths, initiations and shibboleths. Such subterranean fraternities, with their curtained sacrosanctities and hieroglyphics, are utterly foreign to real Christianity with its open invitation and “whosoever”.

Yet none the less, in the Bible, which is simple and plain even to the wayfaring man, there is both the exoteric and the esoteric, both the open and the hidden, the public and the secret. The Bible has depths, significances, traits and seals of supernaturalness which it reveals only to those who explore it in the right attitude of mind, believing it to be, in the fullest sense, the inspired Word of God. And this is no more an argument against the Bible than, in a parallel sense, it would be an argument against a sunset. If some unaesthetically constituted person fails to see in a sunset what the eye of an artist or the mind of a poet sees in it, is that the fault of the sunset? The artist and the poet are not merely imaginatively seeing what is *not* there; but the eye of the obtuse observer is certainly missing something that *is* there.

All who know anything about music will agree that a more intellectually satisfying, cerebral music was never composed than that of Johann Sebastian Bach. There is a mental as well as a purely musical enjoyment in his fugues and in some of the best-known passages from his cantatas. The perfect genius with which he inter-weaves treble and bass clefs while simultaneously bringing out his melodic phrase, first in one hand and then in the other, first in the tonic and then in the dominant, now in the major and now in the minor, now exhibiting one strand and now another, and now weaving all the strands into the one fabric of a glorious harmony—it is all a sheer delight to the musically initiated. Suppose, then, that three persons are hearing one of Bach's greatest fugues. One of the three hearers is naturally unmusical; another is musical enough naturally but quite untrained in "musical appreciation"; the third is sensitively musical by nature and at the same time trained in the science and art of music. Is it Bach's fault that the first two fail to appreciate the charm of sound and form in his composition, while the third not only enjoys the actual succession of notes and chords, but discerns and follows and revels in the genius of latent melody and design running through it all and binding the whole together? No, it certainly is not Bach's fault. The difference is in the hearers. It is not that the trained music-lover is hearing something which is not there. The wonderful content is there truly enough, for all who have "ears to hear"; but the other two hearers are more or less deaf to it.

So is it with the Bible. It uses plain words which have as clear and fixed a meaning as the notes of a piano now have in the realm of music. Its great

truths are written so clearly that “wayfaring men shall not err therein.” Yet, none the less, besides that which is patent there is that which is latent. Besides that which is outward there is that which is inward. Besides that which is obvious there is that which is unseen by the many. It is not a case of imaginatively seeing what is not there, any more than is so with the artist and the sunset or the musician and one of Bach’s fugues. Nor is it that the Bible has double meanings. No; the latent and inward and hidden never contradicts the patent and outward and obvious, but it wonderfully enriches it, and illumines it, and confirms the Divine origin of it.

Affixed to a certain wall in a civic building is a large, ornate plaque containing the Constitution of the United States of America, skilfully engraved in copper plate. When you first look at it you see only the engraved writing of the Constitution, but on stepping back a little, so that the light falls upon it, you suddenly see the face of George Washington. The artist has cleverly contrived this in the way he has cut and shaded the lettering. So is it, again and again, with Holy Writ. The divine Artist has caused it so to be written that besides what is actually stated there are ulterior truths which look out at us like angels’ faces when the written Word is flashighted by the Holy Spirit.

We know only too well, alas, that the Holy Scriptures, besides being wrested and twisted and forced to fit theories, may have fanciful meanings read into them by illusionists; but that is not the fault of the Bible; it is the gullibility of auto-suggestion. We marvel with a peculiar awe at the ability and agility which some well-meaning brethren display in seeing what is not there; as also we marvel, with a sense of our own denseness, at the super-spirituality which they evince in aerifying the most unsuspecting details of Scripture into rare spiritual significances. The “three white baskets” which Pharaoh’s ill-fated baker dreamed were on his head are to ourselves part of a true story; but to see in those same three baskets recondite bearings upon the doctrine of the Trinity makes one part of our mind laugh and another part groan. We feel the same sort of reaction when we are assured that the bride’s hair in the Song of Solomon is the mass of the nations converted to Christianity. It is an eye-opener to learn that the “two pence” which the Good Samaritan gave to the inn-keeper were covertly Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. We cannot but feel sorry for Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, when another ministerial victim of typomania tells us that the “four barrels”

of water which Elijah commanded to be poured over the altar on Mount Carmel were the four Gospel writers. As for the clergyman who would persuade us that the boat in which our Lord crossed Galilee was the Church of England, while the “other little ships” which accompanied it were the other denominations, we cannot shake off a sly idea that the novel expositor himself, like the boats, must have been all “at sea”. We feel just the same about Pope Gregory the Great’s exposition of Job, in which Job’s verbose “friends” typify heretics; and his seven sons the twelve Apostles; his seven thousand sheep God’s faithful people; and his three thousand hump-backed camels the depraved Gentiles!

Frankly, we have nothing but condemnation for such zany straining at gnats and swallowing camels. Talk about mistaking molehills for mountains, and mirages for realities! It does not compare with this ultra-spirituality which sees things that are not there, and thinks to illumine the oracles of God with the bamboo flares of ingenious invention. For long years now, men have plied a remunerative trade in making pearls out of paste; and doubtless they will continue as long as people are willing to buy the imitation instead of the real; but whatever we may think of turning paste into pearls, it is pardonable compared with this turning the pearls of divine truth into the mere paste of human fantasy.

Sometimes one finds even the ablest and most scholarly exegetes falling into this imaginative seeing what is not there. England never produced a greater or saner commentator on the Greek New Testament than Henry Alford, usually referred to as “the scholarly dean”. I could only gasp when I found him making this comment on the miraculous haul of fishes in Luke 5: “Here too, only [i.e. in Luke] we read of that first miraculous draught of fishes, *symbolising the universality of the future Church*”!

In our Lord’s triumphal entry to Jerusalem we see only too gratefully a stated fulfilment of Zechariah 9: “Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass” (Matt. 21: 5). But it is a comic shock to find a great commentator like Lange seeing in those two animals the Israelite theocracy and the Christian Church:—“The old Theocracy [i.e. the ass] runs idly and instinctively by the side of the young Church [i.e. the foal] which has become the true bearer of the Kingdom of Christ”!

We are reminded how the Jerusalem Targum paraphrases Exodus 15: 27, “And they came to Elim, where there were twelve fountains of water, answering to the twelve tribes of Israel; and seventy palm trees, answering to the seventy elders of the Sanhedrin of Israel”! All such commenting comes pretty close to the fatal maxim of early Jewish rabbis in their interpretation of the written Law: “Turn it over and over again, for *everything* is in it, and will be discovered therein.”

It is no such fanciful treatment of Scripture which we have in mind when we speak about that in it which is latent and inward and hidden; nor is it any such fraudulent “reading into” it as is practised by certain modern cults. We are referring to what is really there, but is seen only by those who will *allow* themselves to see it, reverently exploring the Bible as the inspired Word of God.

Fitness in the Reader

In a sentence, the point we are making is this: Without detracting in the least from the fact that the Bible uses straightforward language with fixed, clear meaning for all, this further fact remains, that it also contains wonderful treasures of *latent* spiritual truth and supernatural design unseen by the many; treasures which are really there, but which require a certain *fitness in the reader* if they are to be seen and appreciated.

I would emphasize that last-mentioned point about a necessary *fitness* in the reader, and in doing so would insist again that such a requirement is no argument against the Bible. It immediately recalls our Lord’s words, “I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes” (Matt. 11: 25). The class here described as “babes” are those with simple hearts, not simple heads. They are really teachable; and because they have this fitness God reveals to them what He reserves from others. Moreover, this reservation from the one class and revelation to the other is an expression of divine graciousness, for few can become “wise and prudent”, whereas all may become “babes” if they will. We think also of Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 2: 14, 15, “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is *spiritual* discerneth all

[these] things.” So there certainly is a fitness required in ourselves if we are to perceive spiritual truth and beauty; and this is especially true in relation to our scrutiny of the Holy Scriptures.

That notable Christian lawyer, the late Sir Robert Anderson, K.C.B., has a pointed word to the same effect in his book, *The Silence of God*. He says, “The occupant of a university chair cannot fail to be eminent in the branch of knowledge in which he excels, and his value as a specialist is unquestionable. But he may be so utterly unspiritual, and withal so deficient in commonsense, that his opinion may be worth less than that of an intelligent peasant or a Christian schoolboy. . . . The profoundest knowledge of mathematics or Oriental dialects does not qualify a man to judge of pearls or diamonds. Still less does it fit him to recognise spiritual truths. . . . The Bible was written for honest hearts. It is addressed, moreover, to *spiritual* men.” Yes, the Bible is addressed to *spiritual* men. There is a fitness required in the reader. And the first practical test of spirituality in relation to the Bible is whether or not we will bow to its authority; for Paul writes in i Corinthians 14: 37, “If any man think himself to be a prophet or *spiritual*, let him acknowledge that the things which I write unto you are *the commandments of the Lord*.”

The Bible is not alone in requiring “a certain fitness” in those who would have it speak to them. The same is true of *Nature*. See how David commences Psalm 19,

The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament showeth His handywork.
Day unto day uttereth speech;
And night unto night showeth knowledge.
Their *line* is gone out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world.

Yes, “their *line* is gone out. . . .” That word, “line”, first meant a measuring rod, but it came to mean also a tightly stretched cord giving a musical sound. That is why the New Testament quotation of it reads, “Their *sound* went into all the earth” (Rom. 10: 18). Perhaps the ancients were nearer the truth than we have suspected when they philosophized about the “music of the spheres”—that the heavenly bodies make music as they move

around in vast circuit; a gigantic orchestra in everlasting concert, producing mighty symphony and sublime harmonies in the ears of creation's King! Who shall say for certain in this universe of endless surprises? Yet *this* we may certainly say, that quite apart from auricular sound, they talk, they preach, they sing, in a universal language which human minds the world over can understand if they will really listen; for those wonders of the expanse are Nature's album of "Songs Without Words".

Yet while all normal humans have the innate *sensibility* to hear if they will, the "*fitness*" to hear may be in varying degrees impaired. Even in the realm of Nature, there are those who, "having eyes, see not, and having ears, hear not" (Mark 8: 18). Of some much-to-be-pitied people, Wordsworth's lines are just as true as they are sad,

A primrose by a river's brim,
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more.

An apocryphal Mr. Tidcombe had a wonderful pair of spectacles which, whenever he donned them, revealed to him what the person at whom he looked really lived for. One man became a billiard cue; another became a wineglass; another became a bag of money; and so on. The grabbing Scrooges and carnal Lovelusts and gross-minded worldlings live (or should I say merely "exist"?) in a pathetic insensibility to all the mystic voices and companionships of Nature, while the simple-hearted have an inner ear which makes them thrillingly "alive" to it all. Let Helen Rowland Prommel tell you about her dear old grandfather.

Grandfather has grown dull of ear—
He claims that he can scarcely hear
The words we speak, unless we shout
And aid our speech by pointing out
And indicating what we say
With gestures made a certain way.

But go with him to any wood,
And, though his hearing is not good,
He listens to the talk of trees,

And nods agreement to the bees,
And says he knows the clear-cut note
Each harebell holds within its throat,
Which sounds whenever harebells sway
In rhythm with a breezy day.

I cannot catch a thing he hears.
It makes me wonder if his ears
Have grown beyond the commonplace,
And are attuned with time and space
Outrunning ordinary ken
Of all of us who, now and then,
Would give a lot if we could hear
The music of some unknown sphere.

There is such a thing as a sympathetic *susceptibility* to Nature. Those who have it find everything around them alive with mystic meanings and a soul-telephony which they simply cannot explain to those who are without it. Not only the tranquil beauty of azure lakes, the awe-inspiring spectacle of deep-cleft canyons, the multi-coloured majesty of rocky peaks, the silent reaches or haunting echoes of fjords, the scenic trails to Alpine meadows, or the rolling foothills carpeting the descent to wide-flowing rivers, picturesque orchards and flower-tapestried valleys; not only do these speak with splendid flourish, ravishing the mind by their extraordinariness, but the untrammelled simplicities of the countryside, the sighing of a breeze through shadowy woodlands, the pleasant gossip of a brook with the cobblestones, the hoofbeat of a horse in the field, the trill of a robin, or the confidential hum of insects; all these “live” and “talk” or “whisper” or secretly “sing”, to those who are “tuned in”. But when the mind is estranged, the hill is merely an object, the breeze is only a draught, the flower is no more than a plant, the river is just water. It is said that the following lines were written by a convict in Sing Sing Prison

The flowers no more have fragrance,
The Summer breeze feels chill,
The bees seem little gluttons,
And harsh the song-bird's trill:

The diamond eyes of heaven
Look down on bond and free,
But I see all from prison-bars
So what are they to me?

Almost as much depends upon the mind which looks as upon the objects which are encountered. How different the lines of that almost life-long invalid, Mrs. Martha Snell Nicholson—

To me a garden brings
An ecstasy that sings,
A stirring, as of wings!
Companionship with trees,
And freshness of the breeze,
And quiet peace—all these.

Coming back now, from Nature to *Scripture*, we repeat that there is a similar “fitness” of heart and mind required before the Bible is *able* to reveal its deeper treasures of latent spiritual truth and supernatural architecture. As there is a hyper-spirituality which fancifully sees what is *not* there, so there is an infra-spirituality, begotten by a certain type of modern scholarship, which cannot see what *is* there. For instance, the *typology* of the Old Testament is one of the most remarkable phenomena in the Bible; it is the most wonderful form of prophecy ever heard of, and the most deeply convincing when carefully considered; and the Old Testament is extensively permeated by it; yet adherents of the so-called Liberal and Neo-orthodox schools of theology seem strangely blind to it. The following quotation from the late Sir Robert Anderson’s book, *The Bible and Modern Criticism*, is true enough: “The leaders of the Higher Criticism crusade in England have facile pens and they are prolific authors. And yet, if they may be judged by their writings, there is not one of them who is a student of prophetic truth or of the typology of Scripture. Their Bible is but an ill-assorted collection of Jewish books. . . . Of its ground-plan they know nothing.” How different with Dean Alford, one of the greatest among Bible scholars!—“The whole Scriptures are a testimony to Christ: the whole history of the chosen people, with its types, and its law, and its prophecies, is a showing forth of Him.”

Why this difference of perception between the two classes of scholars? It is solely due to a difference of *attitude* towards the Bible. At the end of his famed Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Alford writes (in his *Prolegomena to Revelation*),

“I have now only to commend to my gracious God and Father this feeble attempt to explain the most mysterious and glorious portion of His revealed Scriptures, and with it, this, my labour of now eighteen years, herewith completed. I do it with humble thankfulness, but with a sense of utter weakness before the power of His Word, and inability to sound the depths even of its simplest sentence.”

Yes, indeed, “a certain fitness” is required in the reader. Did not our Lord Jesus Himself say, “Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice”—implying that there were others who could *not* hear? (John 18: 37). Ample scope exists for reverent scholarship; but there is a wrong attitude, a wrong approach, which blinds even scholarly minds to supernatural credentials which are as vivid and beautiful to spiritual minds as the brightest rainbows which ever arched the valleys.

The Bible will no more speak to some minds than Christ would speak to Herod when delivered to him by Pilate. Who was that fox, that he should set himself to judge Calvary’s Lamb and Judah’s Lion? And who are those men who set themselves to judge the Bible, instead of being judged by it? When will they learn that the Lamb is the Lion, and that this most human of all books is also authentically divine? It was not without reason that our Lord flung the epithet, “Ye blind guides!” at the religious aristocrats of old-time Jewry. And it is not without reason that the Bible is a drawn curtain to some minds today. It is said that a bygone British “Astronomer Royal”, having observed certain seeming irregularities among the heavenly bodies, profanely exclaimed, “Had *I* been with the Creator when He made the world, I could have given Him some good advice.” The conceited genius belonged to that class referred to by our Lord as “the wise and prudent”, to whom God does *not* reveal spiritual truths. “The meek shall inherit the earth”, says the Psalmist, wistfully anticipating the Millennium; and it is the meek who inherit the *Bible* too, though without any postponement until that

future age. “Never man spake like this Man!” exclaimed the officers who went to arrest Jesus but fell prey to His matchless eloquence; and “Never book spake like *this* Book”, say all who devoutly explore the Bible as the plenarily inspired Word of God.

To those who have eyes to see, and ears to hear, and hearts which welcome truth, it radiates a supernal light such as never shone on land or sea. It speaks with a voice like the sound of many waters; and it enriches with imperishable treasures which are above all price.

SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION

“Which things also we speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth, INTERPRETING SPIRITUAL THINGS TO SPIRITUAL MEN.”

First Corinthians 2: 13

(A.S.V. margin).

You may put a telescope into the hands of a man who is blind, and bid him look at some distant star, or on some lovely landscape. He tells you he sees nothing. Well, his witness is true. So the Agnostic affirms of all supernatural religion, that he knows it not. His witness also is true. But if the blind man goes further, and asserts, that because he sees nothing there is *nothing to see*, his assertion is untrue and his witness is worthless because he speaks beyond the range of his capacity. Such is the value of the natural man’s *opinion* when he declares his mind on spiritual things. But the natural man may *become* spiritual. The spiritually blind may be restored to sight. The Agnostic who “knows not” may be brought to see and understand and know.

Evan H. Hopkins.

SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION

As we have urged, there must be a certain fitness in the reader, if the Bible is to be explored with sanctifying profit and maximum yield. There is need also for *spiritual illumination*, an enlightening of the mind by the Holy Spirit. Every night-driver on the highways has been grateful for those rows of little white posts which mark dangerous bends on the road. The reflectorized studs or “eyes” in the posts are scarcely noticeable during the daytime, but at night they flash out brilliantly as soon as they are caught in the headlights of a car. By parallel, that is what happens as a prayerful Christian believer goes through the Bible under the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Again and again, that which is the mere “letter” to other readers lights up with living significance. This is one way in which the Word of God guards itself from vulgar presumption and from scholarly unspirituality; its deeper truths are luminous only to the illuminated.

Such spiritual illumination is never denied those who approach the Bible with reverent deference. The same Spirit who inspired its *writers* now waits to illumine its *readers*. This constitutes both a challenge and an allurements: a challenge to study it with prayerful teachableness, and a pledge of heaven-given enlightenment if we *do* (Jn. 14: 26, Eph. 1: 18, 1 Jn. 2: 27).

Therefore, although we would avoid unduly lengthening our vestibule to this series of studies, ought we not to halt here and deliberately “encounter” this priority fact that we *need* illumining by the Holy Spirit? For even the best-intending among us can easily slip into a self-sufficient learning of the Bible which results in knowing without seeing.

Ezra, most venerable and influential figure among the Jews of the post-exile repatriation, is a salutary example to us. In the little book which bears his name, chapter 7: 10 says, “For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of Jehovah, and to do it, and to teach in Israel the statutes and judgments.” Observe that before all else Ezra had “prepared his *heart*” (which must always be *our* first preparation).

Then note the threefold progress:

1. To *seek* it out (“to seek the law”)
2. To *live* it out (“and to do it . . .”)
3. To *tell* it out (“and to teach . . .”)

Such reverential research and obedient response never lack the illumining ministry of the Paraclete (Jn. 16: 13); and that is the kind of Bible illumination which makes Christian believers “*luminaries* in the world; holding forth the word of life” (Phil. 2: 15, 16).

How clearly the penmen of the New Testament exemplify this divine illumination! Twelve times in Matthew comes the characteristic refrain, “That it might be fulfilled”. Who *taught* Matthew to see those fulfilments, some of which could scarcely have been humanly guessed? How did he decipher, for instance, “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets: He shall be called a *Nazarene*” (2: 23)? Was this extracted from Isaiah 11: 1, a “branch” (*netser*) of David?—or from Numbers 6 and Judges 13 (*nazir*), the Nazarite vow of separation? Either way, among the Jews, that name became *the* name for the hated Jesus (Acts 24: 5). The Jewish Talmud avoids referring to Jesus by name, preferring anonymous coverages such as “that man”, “that known man”; it also descends to stigmas such as “Ben Sta-da”, son of lewdness (a reproach on Mary); but when it *must* name Him, it says “Yeshoo Notsree”—Jesus the *Nazarene*; or simply “the Notsree”, as when Mishna 2: 1 mentions that Sunday is “the day of the Notsree” (*Nazarene*). Yes, “He shall be called ‘*Nazarene*’.”

Who taught non-collegiate Peter that royal David, away back in Psalm 16, was prophesying concerning Israel’s coming Messiah?

I have set Jehovah ever before me
Because He is at my right hand
I shall not be moved.

Therefore my heart is glad
And my glory [tongue] rejoiceth;
My flesh also shall wait confidently;

For Thou wilt not leave my soul to sheol;
Nor allow Thy Holy One to see corruption;

Thou wilt show me the pathway of life.

In Thy presence there is fulness of joy,
At Thy right hand there are delights
Even for evermore.

Who taught Peter (Acts 2: 25) to say of that psalm, “David speaketh concerning *HIM*” (Christ Jesus)? Who taught Peter to see in the words, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in sheol,” an enigmatical anticipation of our Lord’s *resurrection* (2: 31)? Who taught Peter to see in the words, “Thou wilt show me the path of life. . . . At Thy right hand are pleasures evermore”, a secret photograph of the *ascended* Jesus up yonder in *heaven* (2: 28, 33)? See how confidently and lucidly Peter the commentator successively releases the hidden meanings of that psalm, in his Pentecostal apologia (2: 29-36).

Well, we know who opened the eyes of Matthew and of Peter, and of the other apostles, to see in the Scriptures what they had never seen before, although it had been there all the time. Luke 24: 45, says, “Then He *opened their understanding*, that they might understand the Scriptures.” How was this done? It was by an inner anointing from heaven. Had He not said to them, “When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all the truth”? Already the “Spirit of revelation [*apokalupsis* = unveiling] in the knowledge [*epignosis* = insight] of God” (Eph. 1: 17) was initiating them into the mysteries of the Word; but it was at Pentecost that He swept down upon them in the fulness of enlightenment. Hence Paul’s comment in 1 Corinthians 2: 7-12.

“We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery [or secret hitherto undivulged] which God preordained before the ages for our glory . . . according as it has been written: Eye saw not, ear heard not, nor came into the heart of man, the things which God prepared for those who love Him. But unto *us* [emphatic] God has *unveiled* them by His Spirit. . . .”

Who taught Paul to see our Lord’s resurrection latently predelineated in the Old Testament? That apostle had never companied with our Lord in “the days of His flesh” as had the others. Who, then, so illumined him that he

could write to the Corinthians, “He rose again *the third day, according to the Scriptures*” (1 Cor. 15: 4)? Where does the Old Testament say that Christ would rise from the dead? Nowhere, except in veiled allusions such as that which we have just noticed in Psalm 16. Where, then, could Paul have detected the circumstance that our Lord should rise “*the third day*”? He must have descried it during those three “silent years” in Arabia, soon after his conversion on the Damascus Road (Gal. 1: 15-18). At least, that is when his Spirit-alerted restudy of the prophetic oracles began. Did he suddenly find new fascination in those three cynosure prophets, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah?

Those three prophets followed in quick succession during the period which headed up in final judgment on the ten-tribed breakaway kingdom of Samaria-Israel. Such signs were given through them as had never been given before, with the purpose of arresting the moral downgrade; signs which now make them a kind of type-trio. The idea of *resurrection* is expressed through each of them with peculiar force. *Elijah* raised the widow’s son from death. Such a miracle had never been known in Israel before. Yet it was repeated by *Elisha* in the raising of the Shunamite’s son. Indeed, an even stranger thing happened: even after Elisha’s death and burial, a dead man was suddenly quickened to life again through contact with Elisha’s corpse! But most amazing of all was *Jonah’s* experience of something stranger than death, and stranger even than being brought back to life; for he had a resurrection not merely from bodily death, but from “the belly of Sheol”!

Take those three prophets together. *Elisha* died and was buried—as Christ died and was buried. *Jonah*, in miraculous symbol, went down into Hades itself, as Christ also went into Hades. *Elijah* passed through the Jordan and then visibly ascended to heaven—as Christ passed through His Calvary baptism and then visibly ascended to heaven.

But look at those three prophets again. *Elisha* dies and is buried, yet in his death gives life to another—as Christ, through His death, gives life to those who come into union with Him. *Jonah* goes down into Sheol itself, yet is brought up that he should not see corruption—as Christ Himself was not left in Hades, nor suffered to see corruption (Acts 2: 27). *Elijah*, in ascending, casts down his mantle, with a “double portion” of the Spirit, so that his follower on earth might do even “greater works”—as Christ also,

having ascended on high, sent down the Pentecostal enduement upon His disciples, that *they* might do the “greater works” which He had predicted.

Are all these correspondences quite fortuitous? Or rather were they not designed, strangely subtle yet strangely clear, so that godly souls might learn, through latent but living type-teachings, truths which could never be unravelled by the “wise and prudent” of this world? Furthermore, through the recorded exploits of those three prophets was not God preparing the minds of His covenant people for the resurrection of Messiah Jesus, so that an apostle could later ask, “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” (Acts 26: 8).

During his “silent years” in Arabia, Paul began to see in those three prophets “signs and wonders” never guessed at before. In them, all the salient features of our Lord’s resurrection were typically dramatised in advance, even to His “three days and three nights” in Hades and His coming forth again on the third day, as pre-enacted by Jonah, so that Paul could write to the Corinthians, “He rose again the third day, *according to the Scriptures.*”

We realise, of course, that those shadowy Old Testament prefigurings provoke a question. Why *need* there be the covert instead of the overt? Why could not our Lord’s resurrection have been just as openly foretold as His vicarious death and His ultimate triumph in world-wide dominion? Well, the very question underlines our need for that spiritual illumination of which we are speaking.

This we may take for certain, that whenever Scripture expresses truth in half-hidden or enigmatical form there is divine *reason* for it, whether it be in Pentateuchal type or Apocalyptic symbol. Now that those Old Testament anticipations of our Lord’s resurrection have yielded up their secrets in the light of New Testament fulfilment, can we not see good reason why they were given in covert form? It was so that *Lucifer* should not know! Does that sound too startling? Then reflect: if Satan had known, for centuries in advance, that the crucified Jesus would rise from the dead, that in His crucified, resurrected, glorified humanity He would ascend to the throne of universal administration; that for two millenniums there would be a soul-saving Gospel propagated throughout the human race; that upon the seeming wreckage of the Messianic purpose God would begin to erect the wonderful new mystery-edifice, the Church of His dear Son; and that in the

end there would be millions and millions saved to eternal glory, “a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues”; if Satan had known all that in advance, would he ever have hounded Jesus to the Cross as he did, through wicked human accomplices? Nay, on the contrary, he would have exercised all his subtlest stratagems and strongest pressures to prevent our Lord from ever hanging there. The present age and the Church were part of a “mystery” hidden in the divine counsels from “before the ages”, and undivulged until Apostolic times. When the mystery of the Church was then unsealed, Satan sustained the most mortifying reverse of his nefarious career, even as Paul says in Ephesians 3: 8-10,

“To me, the less-than-the-least of all the saints, was given this grace, to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to enlighten all as to what is the fellowship of the *hitherto-undivulged secret* which has been hidden throughout the ages in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ, so that *now* there might be made known to the *principalities* and the *authorities* in the *heavenlies*, through the *Ecclesia*, the many-sided wisdom of God.”

Only as the first nuclei of the *Ecclesia* (or called-out-ones) came into historical being was the long-hidden secret, or “mystery”, released. In order that the deceiver should himself be deceived, neither the resurrection of the Christ nor the emergence of an elect Church was foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures; yet both are there in type and veiled allusion, so that now we may see, in retrospect, that all was foreknown, anticipated, and overruled by our “Saviour-God” (Titus 1: 2, 3).

(Let it be clearly understood that Satan, as a created and therefore finite being, does not know the future, except what he learns of it from the prophetic Scriptures, plus any added disclosure which God may have made to him.)

Again and again throughout the Scriptures, we are treading the borderline of the invisible. We may well turn Philip’s question in upon ourselves: “Understandest thou what thou readest?” And we may truly give the Ethiopian chancellor’s reply: “How can I, except some man should guide me?” In that most ancient poem which has outlived antiquity, sage

Elihu tells the patriarch Job that he needs “an interpreter, one among a thousand” (Job 33: 23). But there is an Interpreter far better even than Elihu’s “one among a thousand”. When Moses pleaded with Hobab to accompany Israel to Canaan, he said, “Thou mayest be to us instead of eyes” (Num. 10: 31). The Holy Spirit, the surest of all interpreters, comes to be our eyes as we “search the Scriptures”, if we are regularly prayerful, unwarped by prejudice, and obedient to the truth. What use, however, are the best eyes in darkness? Even the sharpest-seeing eyes need clear light if they are to see well. The precious wonder is that the Holy Spirit not only gives us eyes to see, but sheds illumining light for us on the Scriptures as we read them.

There is no substitute for this spiritual illumination. Years ago, a lady strolled round a gallery of pictures by the famous artist, Turner. She paused at the painting of a sunset, and then said rather sceptically to the artist, “Mr. Turner, I’m afraid *I* can’t see in a sunset all that *you* do.” Turner replied, “Madam, don’t you wish you could?” It brings to mind a pathetic confession made by one of the keenest intellectuals ever known to me. He said, “I completed divinity training with honours. I took arts and philosophy degrees. I was applauded as ‘a coming man’. I am supposed to be an unusually well-equipped young minister. I know more about the Bible now than my godly father and mother ever guessed at. I still believe it is a remarkable Book; yet somehow it is now a dead letter to me.”

The old-time Scribes were learned and punctilious specialists in the Scriptures; yet see how easily our Lord Jesus foundered them by just one question about just one text.

“Jesus questioned them: What think ye concerning the Christ? Of whom is He the son? They say to Him: Of David. He saith to them: How then does David in the Spirit call Him Lord, saying, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit on my right hand until I put Thine enemies as a footstool for Thy feet? If David thus calls Him Lord, how is he his son? And no one was able to answer Him a word” (Matt. 22: 41-46).

Yes, those “doctors of the Law” were meticulously well-briefed, painstaking and adroit, yet all their scholarly acumen crumpled before that

simple poser from Psalm 110! In contrast, how pellucidly clear is the meaning of that same prophecy to Spirit-illuminated Peter, in Acts 2: 34-36!

“This Jesus God resurrected, whereof all we are witnesses. He, therefore, *to the right hand of God having been exalted*, and having received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, hath poured out this which ye now behold and hear. For David did not [thus bodily] ascend up into the heavens; nay, he himself said: The Lord [Heb. *Jehovah*] said unto my Lord [Heb. *Adoni*], Sit at my right hand until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet. Assuredly, therefore, let all the house of Israel understand that God hath attested as both Lord [Adoni] and Christ [Messiah] this Jesus whom ye crucified.”

We must never think that special illumination by the Holy Spirit ceased with the cessation of the Apostolic period. *Inspiration*, in its unique and authoritative sense, *did* cease then, when the New Testament writings were completed; but although the written *words* remain fixed and immobile, the truth which they release travels energetically onwards with each new generation, ever ahead of the latest discovery, ever springing new surprises, ever disclosing hitherto unsuspected relevances, ever revealing new symmetries and harmonies, to those who are enlightened to see. Each redeemed and regenerated Christian believer is meant to experience this special tutoring by “the Spirit of insight and unveiling”, as we are told repeatedly in the New Testament epistles.

Many of us Christian leaders, preachers, workers, in these days, would do well to pray for more of this Spirit-given insight (*epignosis*) and unveiling (*apocalupsis*), according to Ephesians 1: 17. There is scarcely a sadder failure than that of a Christian minister who, by much reading, reading, reading, becomes more and more *informed*, but less and less *illuminated*. Expanding information *need not* becloud heavenly illumination, but all too often it is allowed to do so, until one cannot really see *into* truth because of all one knows *around* it! There is nothing more pathetic than the deterioration of a spiritual seer into a religious mechanic, or the gradual fading of prophetic vision into mere ministerial versatility.

We need to realize that we cannot see at all without spiritual eye-opening. We need to understand that we *cannot* understand without the “wisdom of the Spirit”. We need to appreciate that only a prayerful dependence on the *divine* Interpreter frees us from dangerous dependence on men. We need to be saved from imaginatively seeing what is not really there; but just as truly we need saving from that sophistication which makes us proudly blind to what *is* there. We must always guard against the fictitious and fanciful; but many of us need shaking from the merely mechanical.

In 1 Corinthians 2: 14, 15, Paul writes: “The things of the Spirit . . . are spiritually discerned; and *he that is spiritual discerns*. . . .” It makes all the difference to read the Bible with such discernment. For instance, to a cursory reader, Luke 22: 1, 2, simply says,

“Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover. And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him; for they feared the people.”

But if we turn a more penetrating eye upon it, seeing two of the words in apposition, how luminous it becomes with *latent* significance!

“Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the PASSOVER. And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill *HIM*. . . .”

Or again, take our Lord’s word in Matthew 12: 3, “Have ye not read what David did when he was an hungered . . . ?” It is an apt reference to 1 Samuel 21; but a discerning eye will see much more in the words, “*WHEN* he was an hungered.” It was when David was in rejection; when, also, weary and needy individuals gathered to him at the cave of Adullam. Correspondingly, our Lord knew that *He* was now being rejected as Messiah-King (Matt. 11: 20-24); and He had just uttered His new message: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden . . .” (28-30).

Take the feeding of the “five thousand”. Presumably, our Lord intended to illustrate by those broken barley loaves and fishes how He Himself must be broken to feed famishing souls. The enthused crowd, however, clamoured to “make Him king” (Jn. 6: 15) and prevented the addendum

sermon. It was preached a day later (25-65): “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. . . . And the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I give for the life of the world” (as the lad’s morsel had been broken and multiplied to feed *them* the day before). But besides that *outer* message to the public, the discerning eye will see an *inner* object-lesson to disciples. Our Lord did four things with those five barley cakes and two little fishes: (1) He took, (2) He blessed, (3) He broke (4) He used. There were “twelve baskets” overplus—one for each of the twelve disciples! The truth fairly gleams from “between the lines”. If only our Lord can (1) really *get* you and me, so that He may (2) put something within that was not there before, as when He “blessed” the laddie’s morsel; and if we will (3) allow Him to “break” us into sympathetic transmitters of His own compassions; then (4) He will *use* us to feed the hungry souls around us, always providing the overplus “basket” for our own sustenance and joy!

Or take that unhappy incident in Numbers 12: the jealous murmuring of Miriam and Aaron against the leadership of Moses. Judgment fell upon Miriam, the instigator; she suddenly became a leper. Tragic? Yes; but a sensitized perception will see an even more disturbing inner meaning. Stricken Miriam shows us what the sin of jealousy looks like to *God*: ugly, loathsome *leprosy*!

And so we might go on, illustrating practically endlessly. No other book is like the Bible. Somehow, its big meanings always hold still bigger meanings beyond; mountains beyond the foothills; treasures concealed behind treasures revealed.

But there is a cautionary word to add. Illumination by the Holy Spirit must never be thought of as a substitute for diligent and methodical *study* of the Bible. Not only are there latent meanings which only the Spirit-illuminated perceive, but there are subsurface coincidences, singularities, confirmations, and other “finds”, which yield only to those who “*search*”.

One of the most startling snapshots of Jesus, in the Gospel records, is His indignant ousting of the money-changers and animal sellers from the temple. There was a flash of awesome ire in His eyes before which the traffickers quailed, as with strong muscle and lithe movement he flung the tables over and poured out the money, and scathingly accused the vendors of degrading Jehovah’s temple into a “den of thieves”. But was there no reprisal? Dig just under the surface, and see. On the betrayal night, when

Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, where did His molesters take Him? The three synoptists say they took Him to the high priest's residence; but John inserts a prior detail:

“Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound Him; and led Him away *to Annas first*; for he was father-in-law to Caiaphas who was high priest that same year” (Jn. 18: 12, 13).

So it was *Annas* first; but why? Rabbi Dr. Emil G. Hirsch says that through the casting out of the money traffickers from the temple, “Jesus . . . roused the hostility of a certain influential family, high in authority, and on terms of closest intimacy with the Roman procurator.” The Jewish Talmud identifies that family. It says that the sale of pigeons and the money exchange were a monopoly of the family of *Hannan*. That *Hannan*, beyond doubt, is the *Annanos* spoken of by Josephus, and the *Annas* of John 18. He was the most influential politico-religious manipulator in old Jewry. His was the crafty hand which, through political pawns, dragged Jesus before Pilate. He kept the high priesthood pretty much in his own family. He had been high priest himself. Now his son-in-law was conveniently in that office. A bit later, in Acts 4: 6, he himself is back again in the supreme chair, surrounded by supporting relatives!

“And *Annas* the high priest, and Caiaphas [son-in-law] and John and Alexander, and as many as were *of the kindred of the high priest* were gathered together at Jerusalem. . . .”

That same sinister dignitary who was the “hidden hand” in the eliminating of the Nazarene was now the robed primate who headed the official follow-up to slay the Apostles. He was the bureaucrat schemer who engineered (unwittingly) the fulfilling of Isaiah's prediction:

“He was taken without imprisonment and without judgment. . . . He was cut off out of the land of the living” (Isa. 53: 8).

It was through Annas, principally, that Jesus was denied a fair trial, either before the Sanhedrin or before Pilate. The “Great Sanhedrin” was the supreme civil and religious tribunal of the Jewish nation. At the time of our

Lord's birth it held its sessions in the "Hall of Squares" on the south side of the Temple, but about the time of His crucifixion it removed to the "Hall of Purchase" on the east. No criminal trial was to be conducted during the night. Nor was any condemned person to be executed the same day as the trial. In the seizure and arraignment of Jesus, the Sanhedrin (through Annas) violated all its own code of fair play. Why must Jesus have been brought before Annas?—then to the house of Caiaphas? It was illegal for the Sanhedrin to meet there! It was illegal for the high priest thus to abuse the presidency for the occasion! It was illegal to prosecute during the night! An unbiassed quorum of the Sanhedrin could scarcely have been summoned! Annas had manoeuvred just the right group there! When morning came, Jesus was pushed before Pilate, *officially* charged with sedition and blasphemy. Yes, there is a great deal just under the surface!

We are all so familiar with the Jewish outcry, "Crucify Him! crucify Him!" that we scarcely think to ask why they did not cry, "Let Him be *stoned!*"—in accord with Jewish practice. But halt at John 18: 31, "Then said Pilate unto them: Take ye Him, and judge Him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him: It is *not lawful* for us to put any man to *death.*" Just under the surface, here is an interesting coincidence: the Jerusalem Talmud (Sanhedrin I. 1 (18a) and VII. 2 (24b) fixes the time when the right to try capital cases ceased in Israel as forty years before the destruction of the Temple. That would be the very year (as some reckon) or year before our Lord was crucified. Thus our Lord died the *accursed* death of crucifixion, instead of a Jewish stoning, thereby symbolising His bearing the "curse" of our sin (Deut. 21: 23, with Gal. 3: 13).¹

Many a revealing "find" may lie just under a *time-mark*. For example, see Ezekiel 24: 1,2.

"Again in the ninth year, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying: Son of man, write the name of the day, even of this self-same day. The king of Babylon hath set himself against Jerusalem [i.e. hath besieged it] this self-same day."

Mark it well: ninth year, tenth month, tenth day. God emphasized it to Ezekiel. So did He in 2 Kings 25: 1, for that is the first time in the historical

books that any event is dated to the very day. So He did again through Jeremiah, even to the day (Jer. 52: 4). Why such particular and repeated emphasis on that date? Well, turn on now to Haggai 2: 15-19. After fifty-one years of exile in Babylonia, the fifty thousand have returned to Judea; but after another sixteen years the temple still remains unbuilt. Those Jews of the returned “Remnant” seem to have mistakenly inferred that the temple could not be rebuilt until the desolations-period of “seventy years” predicted by Jeremiah had expired. They were saying, “*The time is not come*; the time that Jehovah’s house should be built” (1: 2). But now see God’s reply, in chapter 2: 18, 19.

“Consider now from *THIS DAY* and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month. . . . From *THIS DAY* I will bless you.”

The momentous fact is, that from the date emphasized by Ezekiel and Jeremiah, and in 2 Kings 25: 1 (tenth day of Tebeth, 589 B.C.) down to Haggai’s date (twenty-fourth day of Chisleu, 520 B.C.) was a stretch of 25,200 days; that is, *exactly seventy years of 360 days each* (360 days is always the prophetic year in Scripture: compare Dan. 7: 25; 9: 27, with Rev. 12: 14; 13: 15). Through Haggai, the Spirit of God marked the end of that seventy-years period *to the very day!*

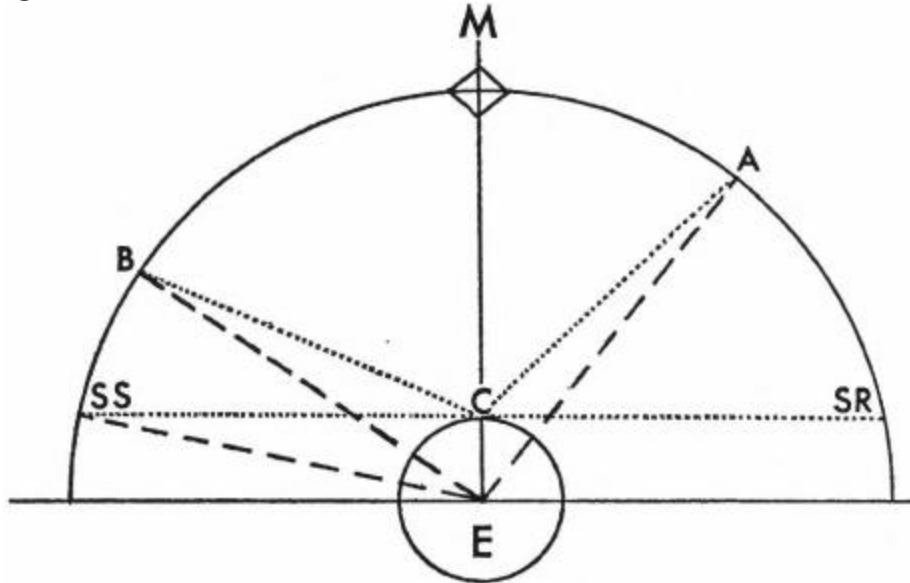
As the Book of God, the Bible challenges our careful scrutiny even down to its very *words*. In a way which could never be true of merely human compositions, very often in these inspired pages there is “a world in a word”. Only the other day, new splendour broke on my own mind from one word in a verse which is often quoted, but only partly understood.

“Every good act-of-giving, and every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness or shadow of turning” (Jas. 1: 17).

All of us who are interested in photography know what is meant by *parallax*. It is a faulty “sighting” which we have to guard against in shooting close-ups. Because the “finder” through which we *look* at a person is fixed a few inches above the “lens” which *snaps* that person, the resultant

photograph leaves part or all of the head missing!—unless we allow for parallax.

What James 1: 17 actually says is, that with God there is no *parallax* (the Greek word is *parallage*) and is an astronomical allusion to parallax caused by transmutation of phase or orbit. We can best see the meaning by a simple diagram of the sun as seen from the earth.



Let M represent the sun at meridian; SR and SS the sun at rising and setting. Let C be an observer on the earth's surface; and E the earth-centre. When the sun is at meridian, the line from the geocentric E, up through earth-surface C, right up to M, is exactly vertical. But as soon as the sun moves from M down to B there is parallax between geocentric E and earth-surface C, as shown by the space between our dot and dash lines respectively. As the sun lowers toward sunset the parallax widens still further. The same is seen from sunrise (SR) up to meridian (M).

Involved with this parallax is *shadow*. When the sun is at meridian, there is no shadow caused behind or before C on the earth's surface; but as soon as the sun rotates to parallax-points B and A, there is the casting of shadow over the earth, shorter and longer. In other words, when the sun is directly above us we cause no shadow, but as soon as it moves from zenith there is a shadow cast before or behind us.

And now read James 1: 17 again. Notice how James, in keeping with his astronomical comparison, calls God “the Father of *lights*”, i.e. the

originating Light from which all other luminaries in the universe derive; the Light above all other lights; the Sun outshining all other suns. He is

“The Father of *lights*, with whom there is no *parallax*, nor shadow cast by turning [or orbital circuit].”

The implications are stupendous: (1) If this Sun knows “no parallax” and casts “no shadow”, then it must always be at meridian. Could *any* figure more remarkably express the *utter holiness* of God than that of a super-sun, or “Father of lights” always at exact and shadowless zenith? (2) If, as the metaphor implies, this Sun which never casts a rotation shadow is perpetually at meridian, then here is a Sun without either sunrise or sunset; that is, without beginning and without ending. Could *any* figure more remarkably express the *eternity* of God? (3) If this Sun never casts a shadow by orbital circuit, then it does not revolve around any centre; it is itself the centre. Could *any* figure more remarkably express both the *centrality and the supremacy* of God, or the theocentricity of the universe?

Such instances might be given practically *ad infinitum*. As the famous Dr. Joseph Parker of Victorian London put it, “The Bible is as endless as its divine Author. The day you say the final word about the Bible it will no longer be the Word of God.” We have shown how latent spiritual significances often lie behind the outer “letter” of the Word; and how all kinds of informing “finds” often lie just beneath the surface of incidents, time-marks, and even words. Only too keenly we realise the inadequacy of our scanty examples; yet we must not further extend these reflections, which are meant to be no more than usefully preparatory to our main theme. To sum up thus far: the Bible requires a certain fitness in the reader; and, if it is to yield maximum reward to us, there are three pre-requisites which must be blended within us: (1) a humble, prayerful teachableness; (2) illumination by the Holy Spirit; (3) methodical and painstaking exploration. To those who fulfil these requirements, the Bible becomes indeed the greatest treasure in the world.

¹ The sudden stoning of Stephen, some time later, was by mob violence, not by judicial sentence as in the case of our Lord.

IS OUR BIBLE COMPLETE?

“All this [the formation of our New Testament] took place in the natural way of history. The Apostles, when they speak, claim to speak with Divine authority, but they nowhere profess to give in writing a system of Christian doctrine. . . . There is no trace of any designed connection between the separate books, except in the case of the *Gospel of St. Luke* and the *Acts*, still less of any outward unity or completeness in the entire collection. On the contrary, it is not unlikely that some epistles of St. Paul have been lost; and though, in point of *fact*, the books which remain do combine to form a *perfect whole*, yet this completeness is due, not to any conscious co-operation of their authors, but to the Will of Him by whose power they wrote and wrought.”

Bishop B. F. Westcott.

IS OUR BIBLE COMPLETE?

WE are to survey the literary structure of the Bible as a whole; but there is one further question which parries our purpose: Do we have *the whole Bible*? In 2 Timothy 3: 16, according to the Authorised Version, Paul says, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction.” The English Revised and American Standard Versions, and now the American Revised Standard Version, emend the translation to, “Every scripture inspired of God. . . .” which might seem at a first glance to imply that *some* Scripture is *not* inspired. Yet the emended rendering (which we need not accept as the truer) is even *stronger* in its testimony to the inspiration of the Old Testament as we now have it; for if we ask *which* Scriptures Paul meant when he said, “Every scripture inspired of God,” the preceding verse (15) tells us: “From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures. . . .” Which, then, were “*the*” Holy Scriptures in which young Timothy had been instructed? Beyond any shadow of doubt they were those which now comprise what *we* call the Old Testament, *and no other*. All of those, says Paul, are divinely and authentically “inspired”. At the time he wrote his epistles to Timothy the Jewish canon of sacred Scriptures (our “Old Testament”) had been in circulation for well over two hundred years, in its well-known triform arrangement—the *Torah* (Law), the *Nebhiim* (Prophets) and the *Kethubhim* (Writings, i.e. Psalms, etc.).

THE OLD TESTAMENT

According to strong Jewish tradition, the canon of the Old Testament was largely settled by the men of the “Great Synagogue”, called together in Nehemiah’s days, and intermittently continuing over a century until it became superseded by the Sanhedrin. Recent critics have cast some doubt on the so-called “Great Synagogue”; but even on other grounds it is equally certain that the Old Testament was settled before the time of the Maccabees.

An unmistakable witness comes to us through one of the books of the Apocrypha, that is, *Ecclesiasticus*, also known as *The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach*. Although it is not one of the canonical books, its authenticity (i.e. as to date and authorship) is acknowledged everywhere. It was originally written in Hebrew, but was later translated into Greek by the author's grandson, who also wrote a brief, explanatory prologue to it. In that prologue the grandson twice refers to the three well-known groupings of the Hebrew Scriptures, as follows: "My grandfather Jesus, having much given himself to the reading of the *law*, and the *prophets*, and the *other books* of our fathers, and having gained great familiarity therein, was drawn on also himself to write somewhat." Then, referring to his own translation of *Ecclesiasticus* into Greek, the grandson adds, "For things originally spoken in Hebrew have not the same force in them when they are translated into another tongue: and not only these, but the *law* itself, and the *prophecies*, and the *rest* of the books have no small difference when they are spoken in their original language" (italics ours).

Now in that introduction to *Ecclesiasticus* the grandson also tells us the *date* of his translating the work. He says it was soon after his entering Egypt "in the eight and thirtieth year . . . when Euergates was king". That, say the experts, was about 132 B.C., and it means that the original writing of *Ecclesiasticus* in the Hebrew by his grandfather, Jesus Ben-Sirach, would therefore be about as early as 200 B.C., or, as some incline to think, considerably earlier. Ben Sirach thus apprises us that the Hebrew Scriptures were *already* arranged into their threefold form as far back as between 200 and 250 B.C., which also implies, of course, that there certainly was a recognised *set* of sacred books even at that early date.

Unhesitatingly, therefore, we may say with the always cautious Joseph Angus, that "in the 250 years from Ezra to (the grandfather) Ben-Sirach (444-200 B.C.) a canon of sacred books was formed, practically identical with that of the Hebrew Scriptures."

A convincing further testimony concerning the Jewish canon may be culled from Josephus (A.D. 37 to after 97) the famous priest-historian, who, in such a matter, could make no mistake. It was written about A.D. 90. Note specially the parts we italicise.

“For we [Jews] have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing with and contradicting one another (as the Greeks have), but only *twenty-two books*, which contain all the records of all the past times, and which are justly *believed to be Divine*. Of them, five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the tradition of the origin of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little short of three thousand years; but as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, *the prophets* who were after Moses wrote down what was done in their times, in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life. It is true, our history hath been written *since* Artaxerxes [i.e. since the time of Nehemiah] very particularly, *but hath not been esteemed of the like authority with the former* by our forefathers, because there *hath not been an exact succession of prophets since that time*. And how firmly we have given credit to *those* books of our own nation [i.e. those up to Nehemiah’s time] is evident by what we do; for *during so many ages as have already passed*, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take anything from them or to make any change in them, but it becomes natural to all Jews, immediately from birth, to esteem those books to contain Divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willingly to die for them.”

So, then, those books which eventually constituted the Jewish canon were admitted only after long recognition as Divinely inspired. No book was admitted which was not believed to have been in existence in the time of Nehemiah; for the Sanhedrin held that inspiration ceased with the Prophets, and that no “prophet” (i.e. no divinely inspired teacher) had come since the time of Nehemiah. During “*so many ages*” as had “*already passed*” when Josephus wrote, since those twenty-two books had come to form the canon, nothing had been added and nothing deleted. There is nothing whatever to countenance any suspicion that Josephus is representing the opinion merely of any one party or country.¹

It is as clear as a sunlit pike, therefore, that when Paul wrote, “Every scripture inspired of God . . .” he meant our Old Testament, Genesis to

Malachi. He meant every part within it; but *none outside it*.

Perhaps for the benefit of some among our readers who may not be so familiar with the Jewish counting and grouping of the Old Testament books we ought to explain why Josephus refers to them as twenty-two books, and not thirty-nine (as they *now* appear in our Bible). As far as can be traced back, the original count of the Jews was *twenty-four* books.

ORIGINAL JEWISH ARRANGEMENT OF OLD TESTAMENT

1. <u>THE LAW</u>	3. <u>THE PSALMS</u> (or " <u>WRITINGS</u> ")
Genesis	Psalms
Exodus	Proverbs
Leviticus	Job
Numbers	Song of Solomon
Deuteronomy 5 books	Ruth
	Lamentations
2. <u>THE PROPHETS</u>	Ecclesiastes
	Esther
<u>The Former Prophets</u>	Daniel
Joshua	Ezra & Nehemiah
Judges	1 & 2 Chronicles (one)
1 & 2 Samuel (one)	11 books
1 & 2 Kings (one) 4 books	
	<i>Total</i> 24 books
<u>The Latter Prophets</u>	
Isaiah	
Jeremiah	
Ezekiel	
12 Minor Prophets. 4 books	

Later on, some Jewish authorities affixed Ruth to Judges and Lamentations to Jeremiah, thus reducing the number to 22, corresponding

to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. This, of course, was a mere contrivance, but it explains why Josephus gives the number as 22. Those 22 of which Josephus speaks so proudly and to which he testifies so confidently are the 39 which now together make up our Old Testament; *no more and no less*. The reason they are now 39 in our Old Testament is that the Minor Prophets are twelve instead of grouped into one; Samuel and Kings and Chronicles are each two instead of one; Ezra and Nehemiah are two instead of one; also (as originally) Ruth and Judges are kept separate; so are Jeremiah and Lamentations.

The Septuagint

The reason we can speak so decidedly is, that in addition to the foregoing testimonies there is ample other evidence. The only reason we have cited Ben-Sira and Josephus first is the early *date* of the former and the particularity of the latter as to the fixed *number* of the sacred books.

By the beginning of our Christian era there were Jewish communities throughout the whole Roman world. They were eventuations, of course, from the Assyrian and Babylonian dispersion of the covenant people away back in 721 and 587 B.C. respectively. In many places their commercial and social influence was out of all proportion to their size. Everywhere they were concentrations of strict monotheists; for their exile had once-for-all cured the Jews of idolatry. Everywhere they planted the worship of the one true God, who could be represented by no idol. Everywhere there were devout proselytes to the Jewish faith. Everywhere, by reason of the fact that prayer and exhortation had taken the place of temple sacrifice, the worship had become more spiritual than ceremonial.

But the point of special note here is, that everywhere the Hebrew *Scriptures* (our Old Testament) were disseminated and used among those Jewish communities. There may have been translations of the Hebrew Scriptures into Syriac and Latin, but the big fact is that a complete translation had been made into *Greek*, the tongue which had become the inter-racial link of speech practically throughout the civilized world. That translation (the so-called *Septuagint* Version made in Alexandria, third century B.C.) was in regular use among the Jews universally; and because of

it we find Acts 15: 21 saying, “For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.”

This is the fact to mark: Although that Septuagint Version—made in the third century B.C., does not arrange the Hebrew Scriptures strictly after the original Jewish grouping, it comprises those same twenty-four books—no more and no less—to which Josephus bears record.

Philo of Alexandria

To this we may add the testimony of Philo, the Jewish scholar of Alexandria (born about 20 B.C.). Although his witness is less specific than that of Josephus it has peculiar force because of *where* it is given. The Alexandrian and other Jewish settlements in Egypt and North Africa owed their beginnings to Alexander the Great and the earlier Ptolemies. Jewishly separatist though they were, as in every other place, they were markedly different in some ways from Palestinian and Babylonian Jews. Their sacred Scriptures were those *only* in Greek translation. Other books, too, of high religious estimate were translated and in use among them, such as the Apocryphal *First Maccabees* and *Ecclesiasticus*, and still others (written in Alexandria itself) such as *Wisdom*. Philo himself a life-long scholar of Judaism was also so immersed in the speculations of Greek philosophy that there was a saying, “Either Philo teaches Plato, or Plato teaches Philo.” Yet although, superficially at least, in Alexandria, the dividing lines of Judaism may not be so vivid, nevertheless when it comes to reverencing and teaching the divinely inspired Scriptures, Philo seems just as sure as Josephus on the *number* of the sacred oracles. As for the Mosaic Law, he writes:

“After a lapse of more than two thousand years [the Jews] had not changed a single word of what had been written by him [Moses], but they would sooner endure to die a thousand times than consent to violate his laws and customs.”

In his teachings he quotes from books in each of the other two main parts of the Jewish canon, yet nowhere does he ever once quote from any of the Apocryphal books, though undoubtedly conversant with them. It would

appear again that those twenty-four books brought over from the Hebrew to the Greek in the Septuagint Version—those *only* are the Hebrew Bible, according to Philo.

New Testament Witness

To us Christian believers, of course, the most decisive of *all* testimony to the number and nature of the authentic Hebrew Scriptures is the New Testament; and its testimony is so well known as to need only summary reference here. All the way through the New Testament there are recurrent references to an accepted *set* of sacred Hebrew documents which are assumed to contain the authentic *sum* of written divine revelation, and which are variously named, “the Scriptures,” the “Word of God,” “The Law and the Prophets,” “The Law and the Prophets and the Writings” (Lk. 24: 15, 44). Hundreds of times the New Testament either appropriates Old Testament phrase or directly quotes from its various books, and always in suchwise as to treat all three distinctive parts of the Old Testament as equally authentic, equally inspired, equally the “Word of God,” and as together forming one complete whole.

Finally, it seems universally acknowledged that after the time of Nehemiah no new book ever gained admittance into the Hebrew sacred canon, and that as early as the Maccabean period the Jewish Bible was already circulated in its threefold completedness as “the Law, the Prophets and the Writings.” Yes, beyond all peradventure, our Old Testament is *complete*.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Can we speak equally decidedly concerning the New Testament? What about the complex problem of manuscripts? If we do not have the original manuscripts, how can we be sure we have the original words? Who settled which “books” were divinely inspired, and which were not? Who decided (who *still* decides) which should be included in the New Testament, and which excluded from it? If by vote or decree of the Church, then *when*?—and by *which* “church”? Who contrived the present generally accepted *arrangement* of the books, since the order varies in the manuscripts? And

how do we know that the present order is the right order? Could it be that *some* genuinely inspired books were lost, which should have been *in* our New Testament (1 Cor. 5: 9, Col. 4: 16)? Why should not the Epistle of Barnabas, and the Shepherd of Hermas, and the Apocalypse of Peter, and the several other “Gospels”, and the several other “Revelations”, and the First Epistle of Clement, be included? Are we quite sure that those disputed documents, Second Peter, Second and Third John, and Jude, should be kept in?

Such questions *must* be asked, and to many persons they seem, at first, to make the New Testament an intricate problem. Yet the crucial facts are bold and clear.

Fact one: we do *not* have the original documents; but neither now do we *need* them in order to be sure what they said. Nor is this merely a general statement as to what they contained in *substance*; it is true right down to their very *words*, in all but a comparatively few instances. In the year 1863 A.D., at the abolition of slavery in U.S.A., a proclamation of emancipation was drawn up, officially freeing the slaves. The original, which was written on four sheets of foolscap, was destroyed in the Chicago fire of 1871. But do we know what the original said? Yes, to the very letter. Copies had been made by libraries, societies, newspapers, hundreds of which had travelled across oceans to interested spectators on other shores. Careful comparison of such settles without an error what the exact wording of the historic original was. Therefore, even though the foolscap pages no longer exist it would be inane obstinacy to maintain that we cannot now be sure what the original said. Similarly, despite far greater complexity, practically as conclusive a case may be made out for the original text of our New Testament. There are *thousands* of manuscripts, copies, versions, lectionaries, and patristic quotations, from which, by expert evaluation and comparison, the original may be ascertained to the point of finality, with comparatively few and minor exceptions.

Fact two: the writings which comprise our New Testament (1) claim or (2) assume or (3) evince *divine inspiration*. Other supposedly inspired writings of apostolic or post-apostolic days do *not* combine those three differentials. All through the Gospels our Lord claims, assumes, evinces, divine utterance, in His recurrent “I am”, “I say”, “I will”; in His illumining of the Old Testament; in His revealing of new truth; in His parables,

promises, predictions. All four records which report Him bear marks of independency and genuineness. There is a first-hand familiarity with circumstance, and an unhesitating reporting of the supernatural, yet, a marked restraint which at once separates them from *spurious* “gospels” with their exorbitant myths and miracles.

As He drew near the end of His visible ministry on earth, our Lord foretold the Apostles that the Holy Spirit should soon afterward come upon them, supernaturally influencing their powers of memory and perception (Jn. 14: 26; 16: 23). In line with this, the New Testament writers make claim or give sign that the Holy Spirit *did* operate through them. Paul claims that his teaching is verbally inspired: “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth” (1 Cor. 2: 13). Later he adds, “If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet or spiritual let him acknowledge that the things which I write unto you are *the commandments of the Lord*” (14: 37). Again, he certifies us, “The gospel preached by me is not after man; for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by *revelation* of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1: 11, 12). Peter speaks of the same inspiration (1 Peter 1: 12) and assumes the same apostolic uniqueness when he writes, “Be mindful of the words which were spoken afore by the holy prophets, and the commandments of the Lord and Saviour *through your apostles*” (2 Peter 3: 2). The Book of Revelation begins with a claim of divine origin (Rev. 1: 1, 2); and John prefaces his visions by the explanation, “I became in the Spirit. . . .” (1:10). The Scofield note on 1 Corinthians 2: 13 is much to the point:

“The writers of Scripture invariably affirm, where the subject is mentioned by them at all, that the *words* of their writings are divinely taught. This, of necessity, refers to the original documents, not to translations and versions; but the labours of competent scholars have brought our English versions to a degree of perfection so remarkable that we may confidently rest upon them as authoritative. 1 Corinthians 2: 9-14 gives the process by which a truth passes from the mind of God to the minds of His people, (a) The unseen things of God are undiscoverable by the natural man (v. 9). (b) These unseen things God had revealed to chosen men (vs. 10-12). (c) The revealed things are communicated in Spirit-taught

words (v. 13). This implies neither mechanical dictation nor the effacement of the writer's personality, but only that the Spirit infallibly guides in the choice of words from the writer's own vocabulary (v. 13)."

As soon as we turn outside the New Testament to *other* supposedly inspired scriptures, we find inconsistencies which *contradict* their supposed inspiration. This does not mean that they are all necessarily pseudepigrapha, false in authorship, date, or motive; but it does mean that by unbiassed test and inevitable verdict they are not divinely inspired in the unique, inerrant, authoritative sense in which the equally tested, time-proven oracles *inside* the New Testament are inspired. Even if we turn to some of the best among them, like the Epistle of Barnabas, or the First Epistle of Clement, or the Shepherd of Hermas, we find unmistakable disqualifications for canonicity.

Take just one quotation from Chapter 9 in the Epistle of Barnabas. It has to do with the Greek letters of the name "Jesus" (ΙΗΣΟΥΣ). The first letter has the numerical value of 10; and the next letter, 8. Also, in Greek, the letter T (shape of a cross) has the value 300. See now the recondite "mystery" which Barnabas attaches to these. Speaking of *the 318 men away back in Abraham's household*, he says,

"The ten and the eight are thus denoted: ten by I, and eight by H. Thus you have Jesus. And because the cross was to express grace by the letter T, he said also 'Three hundred'. He signifies, therefore, Jesus by two letters, and the cross by one. He knows thus who has put within us the engrafted gift of His doctrine. No one has been admitted by me to a more excellent piece of knowledge than this, but I know that ye are worthy."

One wonders how such puerility ever found place in Greek codices alongside genuine writings of the Apostles for reading in the churches.

As for the First Epistle of Clement (other epistles bearing his name are no longer considered genuine), it comes as a shock to find him enjoining on the Corinthians "offerings" and "service" at the "appointed times and hours", after the Jewish fashion. It is strange to find him tracing the origin of "bishops and deacons" away back in Isaiah 60: 17, which Clement alters to, "I will make thy princes peaceable and thine overseers righteous." Still

stranger is it to find him using as true the heathen fable of the phoenix living five hundred years, then rising again as a new bird from its own ashes. “Even by a bird”, says Clement, God “shows up the mightiness of His power to fulfil His promise” (Chaps. 25, 26).

Were we to start quoting from the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, and other spurious “Gospels”, it would quickly convince even the least informed how rightly we label those extra-canonical writings *apochryphal*.

The New Testament books not only claim and assume divine inspiration, they *evinced* it. There is an indefinable yet unmistakable certainty, authority, finality, about them, which one finds nowhere outside our Bible. Even in reading the “Fathers”—the immediate successors of the Apostles, one is conscious of the wide break between *their* writings and those of the Apostles. Outward similarities between the Patristic and the Apostolic writings only serve to emphasize the inward, vital contrast between them. The very fact that the Fathers were so *near* to the Apostles, shows the more clearly how *far* they were from them.

Fact number three: the way in which our New Testament canon gradually emerged confirms that *God Himself controlled its formation*. Perhaps a superficial review might at first suggest otherwise; so let us begin back at the beginnings. Admittedly some of the earliest Greek copies of the New Testament included a few other writings. Codex Sinaiticus contains the Epistle of Barnabas and (in part) the Shepherd of Hermas. Codex Alexandrinus includes part of Clement’s epistles. Codex Claromontanus retains the Epistle of Barnabas, Shepherd of Hermas, and the Apocalypse of Peter. Codices Ephraemi and Bezae are incomplete, so we do not know whether they appended extra writings.

Although many of the existing Greek manuscripts are incomplete, so far as evidence points it seems fairly inferable that *all* the books now in our New Testament were in *all* the early Greek copies. But the early Syriac version, the *Peshito*, did not contain 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. What, then, about those books *added* in the early Greek copies, and those *omitted* from the Syriac (and perhaps from the Latin)?

Well, at this point the “Fathers” and “Councils” help us, from 200 to 400 A.D. The following lists give us what *they* considered to be the authentic oracles.

Origen	(186-254)	Same as ours, but reports doubts on James and Jude, 2 Peter, and 2 and 3 John.
Eusebius	(260-339)	Same as ours, but says that the above five and Revelation doubted by some.
Athanasius	(209-373)	Same as ours.
Cyril of Jerusalem	(315-386)	Same as ours, except omits (possibly accidentally) Revelation.
Council of Laodice	(364)	Same as ours, but omits Revelation.
Epiphanius	(367-403)	Same as ours.
Gregory Nazianzen	(329-389)	Same as ours, except omits Revelation.
Philastrus	(380)	Same as ours, except omits Hebrews and Revelation, but elsewhere acknowledges them.
Augustine	(354-430)	Same as ours.
Jerome	341-420)	Same as ours (although doubting Pauline authorship of Hebrews).
Council of Carthage	(400)	Same as ours.

So, then, although at the beginning, there were a score of so-called “Gospels”, a dozen “Acts”, a dozen “Epistles”, four or five “Revelations”, and other supposedly sacred literary ebullitions, and although several of better quality became included in some Greek manuscripts along with our New Testament books, the stream of conviction, from sub-apostolic times to the fifth century, cuts a significantly uniform channel. The non-inspired writings were excluded; very few of the really canonical books were doubted; and both Councils (Laodicea and Carthage) endorsed the twenty-seven documents—neither more nor less—which comprise our New Testament today.

Not that this completely settles the matter. Even the great Reformers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are not exactly unanimous. Erasmus endorsed the canonicity of Hebrews, 2 Peter, and the Revelation, but questioned their apostolic origin. Luther had no mind to accept Hebrews, James, Jude, Revelation. Calvin was not sure of James, 2 Peter, and Jude, though retained them in the canon. But influential as those Protestant giants were, in the absence of any new evidence they were too late in the Church's history to be specialists in such decisions, and they were not able to overturn what we may now call, in review, the *mass-conviction* of Christian saints, scholars, and laity through the centuries, that the list of books completed and endorsed by the early Church is, in its entirety, and to the exclusion of all others, the divinely inspired canon of New Covenant revelation.

Need we doubt that this conviction has been *of God*? One of the most mysterious yet fascinating aspects of man's history is the parallelism of divine sovereignty and human free-will. The classic Biblical exhibition of it is the Book of Esther. In that book God is not once mentioned, yet He is everywhere immanent. To find a problem in this non-mention of God is to miss that which, above all else, we are intended to see! Had the story didactically *explained* that it was God who was super-directing all the issues, the dramatic force and moral impact of the episode would have been crippled; for above all else we are meant to see how, without constricting human free-will or the natural evolution of sequences, a hidden Power unsuspectedly but infallibly controls all things. We are meant to see providential *overruling* as distinct from supernatural *intervening*. There is not one miracle, yet the whole thing in its ultimate meaning is a mighty miracle—the mighty miracle whereby a sovereign Deity so disposes all non-miraculous events as to bring about a predetermined outcome, without the *need* for miraculous interventions!

In an equally determinative way God has providentially guided and guarded the formation of our New Testament. How can we think otherwise, if its writings are indeed, as they claim and evince, divinely inspired? How careful *human* authors are about the books which they write, the more so if their writings are highly significant or concern momentous issues! Well, the Almighty has caused a book to be written in contributory parts all of which are necessary to each other and to the complete message. Its subject is the

most momentous conceivable, namely, the salvation of the soul; and it involves the eternal destiny of millions. Can we think, then, that the almighty God would be less concerned about *His* book than human authors about theirs? Nay, the very necessities of the case require us to think otherwise. If the New Testament really *is* of God, then He *must* have guided and guarded its formation. And the history of the canon confirms that in very truth He *has* guided and guarded it.

But someone is sure to ask: How old is the oldest Greek manuscript of the New Testament, and what books does *it* contain? The oldest two are the *Codex Sinaiticus* and the *Codex Vaticanus*. Both carry such clear marks of their approximate age that the experts are unanimous in dating them as early fifth-century copies. Both are copies, of course, from still *earlier* copies. Both contain no less and no more than the very books which we now have in our New Testament (though *Codex Vaticanus* has a few chapters of Hebrews missing). Next to these is *Codex Alexandrinus*, which again is a fifth-century product, and which again contains (with some passages missing in Matthew, John, 2 Corinthians) just the same 27 books.

Most of the other *Uncials* (manuscripts written in capitals) and the 1600 or so *cursives* (those written in small letters) are incomplete, and many are fragmentary; but their total evidence is, that from at least the fourth century, or earlier, the accepted New Testament canon was as it is today.

However, someone will ask: What about the *gap* between the New Testament Apostles and that fourth century? Well, that is where the testimony of the early Christian “Fathers” and “Councils” helps us. These we have already referred to in our list beginning with Origen (186-254); and even at that early date the acknowledged books are the same 27 (with doubts reported only on James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John). But what about the lesser gap between the Apostles and Origen (say from A.D. 80 to 200)? The answer is as interesting as it is clear.

The period from the Apostles to about 300 A.D. runs in markable stages. The first (A.D. 80 to 120) is the period of outreach and organization. The second (120 to 170) is the interval of the first Christian *Apologists*, when the New Testament documents began to be quoted in debate and defence. The next (170-300) shows the emergence of a *set* of writings generally accepted as “canonical”, i.e. as the authentic documents of the *New Covenant*, as distinct from those of the Old. Despite differences between

one scholar and another, or between one area and another, as to this or that book which should be added or omitted, the general consensus of conviction became so definite as to the 27 which now comprise our New Testament that the scholarly Bishop Westcott says: “The real history of [the formation of] the Canon, as far as it has any original value, closes here” (that is, about 300 A.D.).

There are many other interesting aspects of the matter which might be profitably considered, such as the Apostles’ Jewish disinclination for literary work; their writing only through necessity; their expectation that the kingdom of our Lord was soon to begin on earth, and their little dreaming that they were writing (under the impulse of the divine Spirit) for centuries of future history; their having no idea that their independent writings would eventually be gathered into one, wonderful homogeneous and progressively patterned whole; the *pros* and *cons* of the sub-apostolic “Fathers”, the “Apologists”, and the later Patristic “Councils” as to which were the authentic Christian oracles; but to go into all that is not needful here. Our purpose is simply to show that the 27 books of our present New Testament—*no more and no less*—are the authentic originals, and that our New Testament is indeed *complete*.

As we now review all the various factors interplaying in that post-apostolic period of two millenniums ago—widespread persecutions, the burning of precious Christian manuscripts, the scarcity and perishableness of writing materials, the diverting influence of heretics and extremists, the variant judgments of scholars and fathers, we can only say again that the emergence of our New Testament as a clearly demarcated, and remarkably orderly *book*—so gradually, yet so soon and so decidedly, is a marvel of providential super-control.

Fact number four: this divine control over the formation of the New Testament canon surely extends to the finalised *order of the books*. Just as the canon itself emerged into completion and permanence through consensus of Christian conviction, apart from any “order of council” imposing it, so by convergent constraint of circumstance have the books been given their present arrangement.

In the early *Greek* manuscripts the usual (though not invariable) order is:

The Gospels (same order as ours)
The Acts of the Apostles
The Catholic Epistles
The Epistles of Paul
The Book of Revelation

In the old *Latin* copies, the four Gospels generally occur: Matthew, John, Luke, Mark; but when Jerome revised the old Latin for his own version he transposed the order to Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, as in the early Greek manuscripts, and as we have them today. In whatever manuscript they occur, the nine Christian Church Epistles (Romans to Second Thessalonians) *always* appear in that selfsame order, and have continued so ever since. Two of the greatest manuscripts in existence give their full order of New Testament books as follows:

Codex Sinaiticus

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John
Romans
1 Corinthians
2 Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
1 Thessalonians
2 Thessalonians
Hebrews
1 Timothy
2 Timothy
Titus

Codex Alexandrinus

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John
Acts
James
1 Peter
2 Peter
1 John
2 John
3 John
Jude
Romans
1 Corinthians
2 Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians

Philemon
Acts
James
1 Peter
2 Peter
1 John
2 John
3 John
Jude
Apocalypse

Philippians
Colossians
1 Thessalonians
2 Thessalonians
Hebrews
1 Timothy
2 Timothy
Titus
Philemon
Apocalypse

It will be noted that in Codex Sinaiticus (the oldest complete Greek manuscript of the New Testament in the world) the order is identical with our usual present-day order, except for Acts and Hebrews.

When we come to the days of printing, the surviving copies of the first-published Greek text give our present order exactly, both in Stevens (1550) and the Elzevir (1624). How they determined the order none can say, for they did not have *any* of the oldest four Greek manuscripts—which have been discovered since. The great scholar, Erasmus, also (1516) who edited the first Greek Testament given to the Church, followed exactly the same order, which has been followed ever since in all the standard versions.

Is this resultant order altogether by accident? Does it betray the marks merely of stray chance? Is there not a symmetry and a logical progress which bespeak a more-than-human supervision?

Obviously, must not the Gospels come first, with their fourfold portrait of the God-Man Redeemer who is the centre and supreme wonder of the New Covenant revelation now to be unfolded? Is not the Acts of the Apostles the indispensable and clearly designed transition-area between the “kingdom” message of the Gospels and the “Church” mystery of the Epistles? Is it not by an intended relationship that the nine Christian Church Epistles are immediately followed by the four Pastoral Epistles, with their counsels to *pastors* of those churches? At length, after the repudiation of Jesus as King, in the Gospels, and the widespread proclamation of Jesus as Saviour, in the Acts, and the revelation of Jesus as Lord of the Church in

the nine Christian Church Epistles, is it not obviously in keeping with a pre-visualized requirement that the Christian Hebrew Epistles should follow, expounding for perplexed Hebrew converts, and for all time, the relationship of the Christian faith to the Jewish religion, and exhibiting as nowhere else the new priesthood of Christ in the heavenly temple? And it is not the obviously fitting finale that last of all should come the Apocalypse, unveiling coming events, and reaching on to the end of time?

Is not that the true order for the whole?—first history, then doctrine, then an unveiling of the eventual consumation? Does not Matthew rightly stand first among the four Gospels, as the one who links the New Testament with the Old? Does not John rightly come last, as the one who *interprets* the Christ whom the synoptists have reported? Does not Paul's mighty treatise to the Romans rightly *lead* the Church Epistles group? Does not that other profound doctrinal disquisition, Hebrews, rightly lead the Hebrew Christian Epistles? Is it not according to an intended order, that of the three main letter-writers in our New Testament, Paul comes first, with his emphasis on *faith*; Peter next, with his emphasis on *hope*; then John, with his emphasis on *love*? Is it by accident that the ninefold Christian Church group ends with an apocalypse, or unveiling of our Lord's return to rapture His Church (1 and 2 Thessalonians), and that the ninefold Hebrew Christian group ends with *another* apocalypse, an unveiling of our Lord's return as millennial Emperor over the earth? And is it by chance that the whole New Testament ends with the culminating dissolution of the present Adamic order on earth, and the bringing in of a "new creation" in which Christ, as King of eternal ages, reigns in the New Jerusalem?

Is this all by sheer chance? Are we to be charged with imaginativeness if we see in it a divinely designed order and progress? Can we spare any of those twenty-seven oracles? Not one. Do we need any other added? Not one. Is any of the twenty-seven in its wrong place? Not one. Do the writings of the Apocrypha add any fuller revelation than we have in those twenty-seven? No. Are the writings of the Apocrypha free from obvious disqualifications, as those twenty-seven are? No.

Those twenty-seven, no more and no less, are the true canon of the New Testament. They are complete in their number; perfect in their order; all-sufficient in their revelation of saving truth. The last book of the twenty-seven gives its parting signature to all this; for its final paragraph, which

ends the completed canon, pens a solemn warning not to *add to*, and not to *take from*. “Whoso readeth, let him understand!”

¹ “The popular belief that the Sadducees, like the Samaritans, received only the Pentateuch, rests on no adequate evidence.”—*Bishop B. F. Westcott*.

FOUR BASIC PROPOSITIONS

“The late Dr. A. J. Gordon of Boston used to relate this anecdote. One of the deacons from a negro church in his neighbourhood said that the people did not like their new pastor ‘berry much’; and when Dr. Gordon expressed surprise, saying he had supposed the new pastor to be a fine Bible man, the deacon explained, ‘Well, I’ll tell yer how it is: he’s de best man I ebber seed to tak’ de Bible apart, but he dunno how to put it togedder agin’.”

A. T. Pierson.

Many modern critics have proved themselves adepts at taking the Bible to pieces, but they have been self-blinded to the internal pattern-marks which make all the pieces parts of one exquisite whole.

J. S. B.

FOUR BASIC PROPOSITIONS

HAVING expressed ourselves on the need for a prayerful and illumined approach to the Bible, and having reaffirmed our conviction as to the integrity of the sacred canon, we submit the following four propositions as a manifesto to our examination of the literary structure and strategic perspectives of the Bible.

1. That the Bible is the inerrantly and plenary inspired Word of God.
2. That its formation and preservation are a marvel of divine providence.
3. That if the foregoing propositions are true, it is not surprising that there should be evidences of supernatural control and design in the *arrangement* of the Bible.
4. That the presence of such design in the Bible is an impressive ancillary argument for its divine inspiration.

We do not here *argue* these four propositions; we *assume* them, and simply state them as indicating our own attitude and viewpoint. Perhaps, indeed, it might be truer to call them four *postulates*, for to us they are no longer theorems which require proving, but assumed positions which only require stating. Certainly, all will agree that if the first two of the four are true, then the validity of the remaining two is practically self-evident.

The Witness of our Lord.

As to the first of the four, namely, that the Bible is throughout the plenary inspired Word of God, we take the view that on such a matter the testimony of Christ should be an end of all argument among those who call Him Lord; and His testimony is as clear as a neon sign to all but those who simply will not see.

Our Lord's attitude to the Old Testament (as we have elaborated at length elsewhere) may be crystallised in the following threefold summary: (1) He was always quoting it, but He never once queried it. (2) He always

quoted it in suchwise as to endorse it. (3) He endorsed the whole of it as inspired in the sense that its inspiration is (a) unique, (b) verbal, (c) total.

The only way to circumvent or nullify our Lord's clear witness to the Old Testament is to deny the genuineness or reliability of the New Testament documents under the names of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John; but to do that is to reject the testimony of all the best critical scholarship.

Our Lord was equally clear in His advance pronouncements concerning the inspiration of the *New* Covenant writings which were yet to be penned. Shortly before going to the Cross He not only pre-announced the soon coming of the Holy Spirit, but He did so in a significant, threefold way which anticipatively covered and guaranteed all three areas of the New Testament. See John 14: 26 and 16: 13.

“He shall bring to your remembrance” . . . (the Gospels)

“He will guide you into all the truth” . . . (the Epistles)

“He shall show you things to come” . . . (the Apocalypse).

Is there need for further quotation? The witness of Christ to the Old Testament Scriptures is definite and decisive; and we insist again that His word should be an end of argument to those who call Him Lord. Equally meaningful is His anticipation of the *New* Testament.

A Marvel of Providence.

As for our second proposition, that the formation and preservation of the Bible are a marvel of divine providence, all who know anything about the epic-drama-romance of its survival, compilation, circulation and triumphant self-multiplication will concur at once. Through centuries it has aroused intense veneration and provoked strangely intense opposition. No other book has been so loved, or so hated. No other writings have evoked such acclaim or endured such attack. The mightiest powers of successive generations have determined on its obliteration, but it has out-persevered the most tenacious hostility. Not once or twice merely, its enemies have crucified it, and have thought it dead and buried, only to find that they could no more succeed against it than Pilate could keep our Lord's body in the sepulchre, or Adolph Hitler could exterminate the Jews. As Henry

Rogers argues, the very opposition which the Bible has aroused towards itself, both in the past and in the present, is a sign of its supernatural origin. If the enemies of the Bible really believe it to be nothing more than they *profess* to believe, why do they honour it by such never-ending attention? Why do they not treat it in the way they certainly would if it were nothing more than they say it is? Why do they not treat it with the same sort of light regard or evanescent interest which they show toward Aesop's fables, or the myths of ancient Greece, or the Veda of the Brahmins, or the Zend-Avesta of the Parsees, or the philosophy of Spinoza, or the theories of some modern scientists? Deep in our hearts we know why.

Meanwhile the Bible, which in its present form has weathered the blast of seventeen centuries, now speaks in over eleven hundred languages. Even Homer and Shakespeare, who have been translated respectively into twenty and forty languages, are thus left distantly behind. Until recent times the only two books outside the Bible which reached a three-figure translation into other languages were John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and Thomas a Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*; and both, of course, are by-products of the Bible. Moreover, of the more than eleven hundred languages in which the Bible now speaks, either in whole or in part, over three hundred of them had actually to be created, grammatically, to receive it. Alphabets have been drawn up, grammars constructed, and words invented, all that the ocean of Bible truth might roll its tides on farther and still farther shores. Still more translation of the Bible goes on today. The wonderful book is a literary phenomenon altogether unmatched. It has a history and an influence in the world which lifts it above every other book, ancient or modern.

Adolph Hitler's *Mien Kampf* was going to oust the Bible; but who reads the Führer's pseudo-classic any longer? A far more sinister challenge exists today in certain Communist works which are being disseminated on a vast scale, with governmental subsidy and organised determination. Apparently, the Bible is no longer the world's "best seller." The works of Lenin now lead, having been translated into eighty-one more languages than the Bible. The writings of Stalin come third, with 689 translations. The fourth and fifth places are held by the Russian novelists, Tolstoy and Gorki. Now that the Stalin "myth" has been exploded by the very despots who invented it, the propagation of his ebullitions may the more quickly decline. But if Kremlin prestige demands that Russia *must* have the highest skyscraper,

and the biggest missile, and the widest-sold book, the very determination to outsell or at least to out-distribute the Bible, is inadvertently writing out a new *testimony* to the Bible.¹

Think who Lenin and Stalin were; men whose minds were breeding-swamps of treachery, and whose hands reeked with the blood of wholesale murder. Lenin, whose real name was Vladimir Ilyich-Ulyanov, was first let loose upon Russia in 1917 by the German high command (to whom he sold his services) as it advantaged Germany during the First World War to ferment trouble inside Russia. In retrospect, Sir Winston Churchill wrote, “It was with a sense of awe that they [the Germans] turned upon Russia the most grisly of all weapons. They transported Lenin in a sealed truck like a plague bacillus from Switzerland into Russia.” Sir Winston goes on to speak of him in measured yet awful syllables such as could be applied to few men who have ever lived:

“His sympathies cold and wide as the Arctic Ocean; his hatreds tight as the hangman’s noose. His purpose, to save the world; his method, to blow it up. . . . Lenin was the Grand Repudiator. He repudiated everything. He repudiated God, King, Country, morals, treaties, debts, rents, interest, the laws and customs of centuries, all contracts written or implied, the whole structure—such as it is—of human society. In the end he repudiated himself. He repudiated the communist system. He confessed its failure in an all-important sphere. He proclaimed the New Economic Policy and recognised private trade. He repudiated that he had slaughtered so many for not believing. They were right after all, it seemed. They were unlucky that he did not find it out before.

“Lenin’s intellect failed at the moment when its destructive force was exhausted, and when sovereign remedial functions were its quest. He alone could have led Russia into the enchanted quagmire; he alone could have found the way back to the causeway. He saw; he turned; he perished. The strong illuminant that guided him was cut off at the moment when he had turned resolutely for home. The Russian people were left floundering in the bog. Their worst misfortune was his birth; their next worst—his death.”

As for Josef Stalin, it has been said again and again that he was responsible for more murders, probably, than any other man who ever lived. But we will waste no more space on him here.

What of the *influence* exercised by the Lenin and Stalin writings versus that of the Bible? Everywhere that the former infiltrate, they ferment violent discontent and treachery, inflame hatred and cruelty, and crush the individual beneath the merciless Juggernaut of totalitarianism. With promises of liberation, they forge the fetters of the grimmest slavery ever known. Human dignity and decency are destroyed. Of real morality those Communist publications know nothing. Despite their specious economic championing of the proletariat against the “bourgeois” and “bureaucrat” capitalists, they view men as merely the animal mass-product of a blind evolution in a universe without God or goal.

On the other hand, wherever the *Bible* has been received, it has ennobled and liberated men. This cannot always be said of the organised Christian Church; for again and again, in one country or another, the organised Church has wandered away from the Bible (never more so perhaps than in the Greek Orthodox Church of pre-Communist Russia!); but the Bible itself has brought moral and social progress everywhere and every time it has been heeded and honoured. This fact is so conspicuously demonstrable, both geographically and historically, as scarcely to need comment. Such a crisis is being precipitated today by Communist literature and machinations that it cannot be long now before history gives us crowning proof that our dear old Bible which has weathered all the blasts of bygone centuries is indeed “the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.”

The Present Order and Grouping.

If the foregoing propositions are true, then, as we have said, the validity of the remaining two is self-evident: (1) That the presence of divine design in the structure or *arrangement* of the Scriptures is in keeping with what might be expected; (2) that the presence of such supernatural structural design is an impressive ancillary argument for divine inspiration.

We know, of course, that the order in which the books of our Old Testament occur is not their strictly *chronological* order, which would seem

to be somewhat as follows:

APPROXIMATE CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER OF OLD TESTAMENT WRITINGS

<i>FIRST PERIOD</i> (Pre-Mosaic to Samuel)	<i>SECOND PERIOD</i> (Samuel to Exile)	<i>THIRD PERIOD</i> (Exile to Malachi)
Book of Job	Second Samuel	First Kings Second Kings
Pentateuch	Song of Solomon	
Genesis		Ezekiel
Exodus	Proverbs (mainly)	Daniel
Leviticus	Ecclesiastes	First Chronicles
Numbers	Prophets Obadiah ¹	Second Chronicles
Deuteronomy	Jonah	Esther
	Joel ¹	Ezra
Joshua	Amos	
	Hosea	Nehemiah
Judges	Micah	
	Nahum	Haggai
Ruth	Isaiah	
	Psalms (largely compiled by Hezekiah)	Zechariah
First Samuel	Prophets Zephaniah	Malachi
	Habakkuk Lamentations	

<p><i>Note: Job is almost certainly of earlier date than the Pentateuch. Had the Mosaic law been already given, it would surely have been mentioned in a debate covering divine providence, human responsibility, sin, penalty, and suffering.</i></p> <p><i>Probably the editing of the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, was by the saintly scholar-prophet, Samuel.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Jeremiah</p> <p><i>Note: All the historical books of the Old Testament, in their minute and graphic description, prove that they are from contemporary documents. It is also clear that they were edited and compiled later. It was with Samuel, properly, that the organised, educated school of writing prophets began in Israel.</i></p>	<p><i>Note: The Books of the Kings would be compiled from contemporary records and then emerge completed during or just after the Exile.</i></p> <p><i>The final editing of all three periods of writings would be by Ezra and his successors of the “Great Sanhedrin”.</i></p>
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1 I believe the arguments for the late-dating of Obadiah and Joel are defective.

Nor is the present order of our Old Testament that of the *Jewish* canon; which fact, however, seems to make their *present* arrangement the more indicative of a heavenly overruling. The natural thing for the Jews would have been for them to arrange the Old Testament writings in chronological order, but they did not do so even from the first (except to leave the earlier books so), and they have never done so since. They arranged them into the *Torah* (the Law), and the *Nebi'im* (the Prophets), and the *Kethubim* (the Writings) thus:—

JEWISH CANON OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

First Group	Second Group	Third Group
THE LAW (<i>Torah</i>)	THE PROPHETS (<i>Nebi'im</i>)	THE WRITINGS (<i>Kethubim</i>)
Genesis	<i>Former</i>	<i>Former</i>
	Joshua	Psalms
Exodus	Judges	Proverbs
	Samuel	Job
Leviticus	Kings	<i>The Five Rolls</i>
	<i>Latter</i>	Song of Songs
Numbers	Isaiah	Ruth
	Jeremiah	Lamentations
Deuteronomy	Ezekiel	Ecclesiastes
	The twelve	Esther
		<i>Latter</i>
		Daniel
		Ezra/Nehemiah
		Chronicles

These three divisions probably reflect three *stages* in the process of collecting the books together. Angus's Bible Handbook says, "The earliest Jewish Bible was the Law, the five books of Moses or Pentateuch. Later on, this expanded into the 'Law and the Prophets'. Later still, a final group was recognised as of divine authority, its general title suggesting the miscellaneous character of its contents; and thus the canon was complete—Law, Prophets, and Writings."

Later, when the famous Septuagint translation of those Hebrew Scriptures into Greek was made, in the third century B.C., the natural thing would have been for the translators either to follow the arrangement made by the Jews, or else to restore the chronological order; but they did neither. The Septuagint translators arranged them, or rather were *guided* to arrange them, in their *present* order, which the standard versions of Christendom

have followed (with but slight variation) ever since. It is evidently the *logical* order, and at the same time the true order of progressive revelation: (1) law and history, (2) experience and philosophy, (3) spiritual ethics and Messianic prediction.

Furthermore, in translating the books of the Jewish canon into Greek, the Septuagint translators made certain of the books into *two* books. Thus, instead of one Book of Samuel, and one Book of Kings, and one Book of Chronicles, we have two books of each. Even in that, also, we may discern wisdom; for undoubtedly in each separate unit of our now-completed Bible the Holy Spirit has put some central or distinctive truth or emphasis. How proper it is, for instance, that First and Second Samuel should appear as two separate books, each thereby more clearly making its particular contribution to the developing human drama and divine revelation! Clearly, the principal thing in First Samuel is the fateful *transition* from theocracy to monarchy, with Saul as the first human king of the chosen people. Clearly, also, the great thing in Second Samuel is the *Davidic covenant*; the throne which has lamentably failed in Saul is accepted and confirmed in David, and the far-reaching divine covenant with the house of David is enunciated.

Supernatural Design a Likelihood.

Our third proposition is, that if the Bible is indeed the plenarily inspired and providentially preserved Word of God, then it is not surprising that there should be evidences of divine design in it.

When Paul was making his defence before king Agrippa, he asked, “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” We have sometimes felt inclined to ask a similar question of certain “modern” brethren in the ministry: “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that structural design should be observable in the formation and now-completed masterpiece of Holy Scripture?” Is it an intellectual necessity to assume that the sixty-six-books-in-one have grown together haphazardly, and that their present orderly groupings have eventuated fortuitously?

Too many Christian ministers and seminary tutors become so absorbed in the critical minutiae of Biblical scholarship (so it seems to me) that, in the words of the old adage, they “cannot see wood for trees.” It is possible

to become so preoccupied with textual detail as to miss overall design. The union of the human and the divine in the Bible is as mysterious as it is in our Lord Jesus Himself. The Bible is a poignantly human book as well as the divinely inspired Word of God. It is easy for those who concern themselves technically with its manuscript and documentary questions, its human authorships and backgrounds, to allow its human phenomena to obscure its divine criteria.

I know some able and likeable brethren in the ministry who, through the years, have built up such informed minds in matters of contemporary theology and criticism that they have reservations about this, and reservations about that, and reservations about the other. They look with superior pity on those of us who can still believe in the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures as originally given. And as for there being a superimposed, architectural structure unifying the whole Bible, they think us naive indeed who can believe so.

Yet in truth it is *we* who ought to be surprised at *their* credulity. A widely renowned and gifted seminary professor, with whom I have had convivial contacts over the years, thinks it a mark of penetrating scholarship to have discovered in the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians no less than *seventeen* different authors! How much more precious that epistle becomes when, instead of being an inspired apostolic letter, it is thus found to be a chop-suey of fragments and insertions! How much more authoritative it becomes when, instead of being genuinely Pauline, it is a patchwork of Paul and sixteen sub-apostolic anonimities! I marvel at the superior “faith” of those who can believe such vivisectional nonsense. *Their* “faith” in the Bible is far more credulous than *mine*! Seventeen authors for that one short letter! Eureka! Yet this professorial Archimedes receives the accolade of our denominational panjandrums, as a brilliant contributor to our better understanding of the Bible!

Recently, while examining into the supposed grounds for attributing plural authorship to “The book of the Prophet Isaiah”, I found one German author (now deceased) claiming to have discovered seventy-seven different “hands” in the work as we now have it! Even he was “conservative”, however, since another textual specialist had detected over one hundred and twenty! Yet the methodical plan of First Corinthians, and the over-all structure of Isaiah’s brilliant poem-prophecies, are such as plainly indicate

(if we are willing to see) not only singularity of human authorship, but conformity to an all-controlling divine architecture.

Argument from Design: (1) Isaiah.

Pause a moment, to look back over Isaiah's scrolls. The usual higher critical idea is that what we now call the "*Book of Isaiah*" is more or less a literary mosaic from a plurality of anonymous contributors (or else from two oft-redacted original authors, i.e. a pre-exile *proto-Isaiah*, and a post-exile *deutero-Isaiah*); and that this composite product breaks into two main assortments—"chapters" 1 to 39, and "chapters" 40 to 66. My own contention is that an unprejudiced survey of its total structure shows that the work is a literary unity from one human author who was divinely utilised so as to arrange the material according to a superimposed divine pattern.

The work is *not* strictly in two main divisions as is generally held, but in *three*. Or, to be more precise, between the *first* catena of prophecies (chapters 1 to 35) and the *second* (chapters 40 to 66) there is an *historical* interlude (chapters 36 to 39), which significantly divides and yet connects them. Let me open this up a little.

Start at chapter one, and what do you find? A careful observation of references shows that the prophecies of the first six chapters are all upon *Judah*. The prophecies of the next six chapters (7 to 12) reach out to *Israel*. The "burdens" of the next group (chapters 13 to 23) embrace all the surrounding kingdoms—Babylon, Philistia, Moab, Syria, Egypt, Edom, Arabia, Tyre. Next, chapters 24 to 27 embrace the whole world—as all expositors concur; and (mark it well) the unifying subject through all these expanding chapters is the "Day of Jehovah"—a "day" which certainly came on all those powers, but which, in coming on *them*, forepictured a *final* "day of Jehovah" yet to be. Next, chapters 28 to 33 fling six "woes" upon Jerusalem as the centre of all Jehovah's earth-dealings, and lead to a climax in chapters 34 and 35, which not only embrace all nations of the earth, but reach right on to the end of history. Chapter 34 begins: "Come near, ye *nations* to hear; let the *earth* hear, and all that is therein; the *world*, and all things that come forth of it. For the indignation of Jehovah is upon *all nations*. . . ." That is the "great tribulation" yet to be. But now see chapter 35: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them: and the

desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. . . . And the ransomed of Jehovah shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. . . In chapter 34 we are in the age-end Tribulation—"It is the day of Jehovah's vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion." In chapter 35 we are in the Millennium; a restored Zion is filled with "songs and everlasting joy"!

How remarkable, then, is this expanding development in Isaiah 1 to 35!—first group, *Judah*; second group, *Israel*; third group, the *nations*; fourth group, the whole *world*; fifth group, coming wrath ("woes") on *Jerusalem*; sixth group, Jehovah's world-vengeance and Zion's restoration, or, the *age-end* Tribulation and the Millennium! Is not that a wonderful progress and design? And does it not argue *one* human author behind the whole of it, even as it also indicates the one *divine* Author behind the human?

The prose-written, *historical interlude* which now follows (i.e. chapters 36 to 39) is just as evidently a designed *transition* from the foregoing "visions" and "burdens" to the Messianic poem-prophecy which follows in chapters 40 to 66. The first two of these *historical* chapters (36 and 37) are about the invasion of Judah by *Assyria* (after which time Assyria declines to her doom). The remaining two (38 and 39) are about Hezekiah's illness, recovery, and contact with *Babylon*—which new world-power now begins to fill the scene. Thus these four chapters mark the historical transition from the first 35 chapters in which *Assyria* is the background world-power, to chapters 40 to 66 in which *Babylon* is the background world-power.

As for the great poem of prophecies filling chapters 40 to 66, there is equally clear design. Although we cannot here go into details, we can at least point out again that it falls into three groups of nine chapters each, the end of each group being marked off by the same solemn refrain. Thus, at the end of the first nine: "There is no peace, saith Jehovah, to the wicked" (48: 22). Then, at the end of the second nine: "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (57: 21). Finally, at the end of the third nine, we have the same thing in amplified form (66: 24). The middle chapter of the middle nine is the fifty-third—the *Lamb* chapter! He, the Lamb of God, is the crux, the focus, the centre, the heart of it all!

Are the many such things all by blind chance? It requires far more "faith" to swallow *that* (so it seems to me) than to believe that there is divine coordination operating through them. This latter is what I myself

believe. Moreover, what I believe about the Book of Isaiah, I believe about the whole Bible.

Argument from Design: (2) The Gospels.

To touch on just one more relevant instance, let me mention the four Gospels. Our literary experts have in turn enthralled us and enervated us by their dexterous but always inconclusive latter-day duellings over the origin of the Gospel records. Luke borrowed from Matthew. No; it was the other way round! No, again; both Matthew and Luke are based on an original Mark! Or, wait, did not all of them use one “original” which has now perished—the so-called *Logia*? At the present moment the general consensus seems to be a primary Mark with a resultant Matthew and Luke. I would not sound disrespectful, yet I cannot refrain from commenting that (at least to my own judgement) a clearer appreciation of the overall pattern interlacing the three synoptists and John into one fourfold unity would have saved some of our scholars (and many of their admiring victims) from novel bypaths to nowhere.

It is no part of my purpose here to discuss the human authorship of the four Gospels, but I will not hesitate to remark, in passing, that I do not accept *any* of the fashionable neoteric theories—my main reason being that they are more or less blind to the superb artistry which unifies the three synoptists and John into a progressive, fourfold whole. I do not believe that *any* of the four memoirs was written merely from memory, or that in *any* way the four penmen drew upon each others’ writing. I believe that the permanent records were based upon *synchronous reportings* made by the disciples at the expiry of each day’s observations and experiences as they itinerated with our Lord. The records, all the way through, bear the marks of such on-the-spot and at-the-time reporting; they do *not* bear the marks of the copyist or secondhand fabricator.

The population of Palestine at that time was largely bi-lingual. The language most in use was Aramaic, which, although loosely called Hebrew in the New Testament, as also by Josephus and other writers, and although similar to Hebrew, is strictly a different language from the Hebrew of the Old Testament, having its own peculiarities, and having undergone in Palestine a development of several centuries. The other language in use was

Greek—not Greek in its pure Attic or classic form, but a vernacular enriched by the admixture of Hebrew and Aramaic words and idioms; a form of Greek now known as “Hellenistic”. Aramaic was the language usually spoken by the rural population, the “common people” of Palestine. In Jerusalem and the larger towns, among the rulers and the priests, the educated and trading classes, Greek was generally spoken. That our Lord spoke in Aramaic is indicated by the fact that in two places His actual words in that language are retained for us (Matt. 27:46: Mk. 5: 41). In the capital, especially when addressing the Jewish rulers, He would use Greek, as is indicated in John 7: 35, “Will He go unto the dispersed [Jews] among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks?” The Jews would never have surmised so if they had not heard Jesus discoursing in Greek.

I believe that the Apostles kept concurrent jottings of all that their beloved Master taught and did, as they peregrinated with Him. I believe that they did this primarily for their own careful reference, probably (to begin with) at the insistence of our Lord Himself, and in many a private consultation with Him to make sure that their notes were accurate. I am not surprised that former tax-clerk, Matthew (who probably wrote his original in Aramaic) was particularly concerned to get down carefully what Jesus *said*. I am not surprised that energetic, impulsive, quick-eyed Peter (whose observations come to us through Mark) was the more occupied with what Jesus *did*. I am not surprised that Luke, who wrote some years later than Matthew or Mark, and for a Gentile clientele, should (confessedly: Lk. 1: 2, 3) make use of *all* such written data (perhaps largely of notes by James, the brother of John), and that he (Luke) being a physician should give us the more information concerning the ante-natal and post-nativity occurrences, confided presumably by Mary herself. Nor am I surprised, therefore, that Luke gives emphasis to the human qualities and emotions of our Lord’s perfect humanity, often underlining what Jesus *felt*. Finally, I am not surprised that John (who was probably the Jerusalem representative of the four fish-business “partners”, i.e. Simon, Andrew, John, James: see Luke 5: 7, 10) wrote *his* immortal review in Greek and concentrated on our Lord’s *Judæan* ministry (in contrast with the synoptists’ emphasis on His Galilean activities).

I am tempted to argue all this more fully, but must desist, as I am only concerned with it here in connection with my preliminary reference to a co-

ordinating divine design observable in the four Gospels, which makes them the most wonderful *fourfold unity* which could ever have been devised. There can be no doubt that Matthew puts the emphasis on what Jesus *said*; Mark, on what Jesus *did*; Luke, on what Jesus *felt*; John, on who Jesus *was*. In Matthew, He is distinctively Israel's *King*; in Mark, Jehovah's *Servant*; in Luke, the ideal *Man*; in John, the incarnate *God*. Is it not in keeping that Matthew links Him back to the two covenant-men, royal David and patriarch Abraham? Mark gives Him no link-back at all (for who gives the pedigree of a servant?). Luke links Him right back to Adam, as though, even in a genealogy, he would stress the *racial* over the merely *Jewish*; and he traces back, not through Joseph, who was merely the *legal* father of Jesus, but through Mary, who really *was* the mother of His humanhood. John links Him back to a pre-cosmic eternity, as the pre-incarnate Equal of the Father.

Is it not part of one comprehensive design, that Matthew, the Gospel of the King, ends with His *resurrection* from a conquered grave?—that Mark ends with His *ascension*, in which the perfect Servant is made Lord of all?—that Luke ends with His sympathetic *promise of the coming Spirit*?—and that John ends with the risen Master's "Till I come. . . ."?

We shall see many further indications of complementation and progress when we look at the Gospels more particularly; but for the moment we simply ask again: Are all such dovetailing aspects, emphases, differentials, and counterpointings purely accidental? On the contrary, if the Bible is indeed the inspired Word of God, should we not *expect* them? For my own part, I think we *should*; and I, for one, am prepared to let it reveal so, if it will; for I am persuaded that to appreciate the structural *formation* of Scripture is often a guide to the true *interpretation* of it.

Signs and Seals of Divine Design.

Through the centuries, so we believe, the Holy Spirit overruled to bring about the completing and then the arranging of the Bible as we now have it. We simply cannot think that its growth and present form are the product of chance; there are too many indications to the contrary.

For example, Genesis and Revelation, respectively, not only *do* come first and last in the Bible; they *must* come first and last, and were quite

evidently meant to do so. There are complete and contrastive parallels of such a kind between them as unmistakably show that the Bible, besides being a divine revelation, is also a *completed* revelation.

Note the *similarities* between Genesis and Revelation. In both we have a new beginning and a new order. In both we have the tree of life, the river, the bride, the walk of God with man; and in both paradises we have the same moral and spiritual ideals. God has never abandoned the Eden ideal for man; and although in the end the garden has given place to the city, the Eden ideal finally triumphs.

Mark the *contrasts* between the one book and the other. In Genesis we see the first paradise closed; in Revelation we see the new paradise opened. In Genesis we see *dispossession* through human sin; in Revelation we see *repossession* through divine grace. In Genesis we see the curse imposed; in Revelation we see the curse removed. In Genesis we see access to the tree of life disinherited in Adam; in Revelation we see access to the tree of life reinherited in Christ. In Genesis we see the beginning of sorrow and death; in Revelation we read, "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow." In Genesis we are shown a garden into which defilement entered; in Revelation we are shown a city of which it is written, "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth." In Genesis we see man's dominion broken in the fall of the first man, Adam; in Revelation we see man's dominion restored in the rule of the new Man, Christ. In Genesis we see the evil triumph of the serpent; in Revelation we see the ultimate triumph of the Lamb. In Genesis we see the walk of God with man interrupted; in Revelation we see the walk of God with man resumed, and a great voice from heaven says, "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them."

Note the *completions* of the one book in the other. The garden in Genesis gives place to the city in the Apocalypse. In Genesis we see human sin in its beginnings; in Revelation we see it in its full and final developments—in the Harlot, the False Prophet, the Beast, and the Dragon. In Genesis we see sin causing *physical* death on the earth; in Revelation we see it issuing in the dread extreme of the "*second* death", in the Beyond. In Genesis we have the sentence passed on Satan; in Revelation we see the sentence *executed* upon him. In Genesis we are given the first *promise* of a coming Saviour and salvation; in Revelation we see that promise in its final

and glorious *fruition*. Genesis creates *anticipation*; Revelation effects *realisation*. Genesis is the *foundation* stone of the Bible; Revelation is the *capstone*.

To our own thinking, at least, these contrastive and complete reciprocities between Genesis and Revelation are both a product and a proof of the fact that the Bible is a *completed* revelation.

Uniqueness of Bible Inspiration.

All this, incidentally, has its bearing upon certain moderns who continually argue, "You cannot confine inspiration just to the Bible! Inspiration is a living and continuing thing; it goes on and on, through one generation after another. Shakespeare was inspired; so was Milton; so have others been, through all the years." The reply is clear and, to our own mind, unanswerable. Inspiration, in the supreme and authoritative sense in which we have it in the Bible, *has* ceased with the completion of the Bible. If not, will anyone show us where, in all literature since our Bible was completed, there is any advance upon it, any revelation of truth concerning God, concerning spiritual realities and the unseen realm, concerning the past or the future, concerning morality and salvation, which carries us further than the Bible does? Is there any ethnology or cosmogony which goes further back or gives more light on origins than Genesis? Is there any unveiling of the future, or any eschatological philosophy, which gives us a clearer or fuller unveiling of the future than does the Patmos Apocalypse? In the contrastive and complete parallels which stand out so strikingly between the first book and the last book in the Bible, has not the Holy Spirit made it plain, for all who are willing to see, that until the end of the present age God has said His full and final say in the Bible? After the last chapter of the Book of Revelation there is *no* such further supernatural inspiration. The "Amen" which concludes Revelation 22 marks a *completed* revelation.

But such indications of controlling plan and purpose as we have just noted in the relationship between Genesis and Revelation are found everywhere throughout the Bible. Indeed, as I have remarked elsewhere, our most luminous persuasions that the Bible is divinely inspired are those which come, not through reading copious volumes of Christian apologetics, but through our study of the Book itself. And this is pre-eminently true in

relation to the structure and arrangement of the Scriptures, as we shall see. Believing, as we do, that these Scriptures are supernaturally inspired and preserved, we are not surprised (let it be said again) that there should also be this evidence of structural design. Yet, none the less, when we actually see it for ourselves we cannot but admire it, and prize it as a precious confirmation of our faith.

There is just one further word which we ought to add. In dealing with an unbeliever or outsider we would not give precedence, perhaps, to this phenomenon of design as a Bible apologetic; we would be more likely to start with such arguments as that of fulfilled prophecy. None the less, to all who are open-minded, it is a supporting argument of unique value. As the beauty of an exquisitely coloured and patterned cathedral window is seen from the *inside* rather than from the outside, so is it, perhaps, with this marvel of structural design which we find in the Scriptures. But whether we see it from the inside, with the light of heaven streaming through it, or from the outside, by the light which shines from within, when once we see it, we cannot but be captivated by it.

¹ The Communist leaders spend over three-and-a-half billion dollars annually on printed propaganda.

COMPREHENSIVE STRUCTURE

Away back in the days of the Roman occupation of Britain, that is, during the first four centuries A.D., the fertility of Britain was a source of wonder in the Roman Empire. One writer speaks of it as “a land wealthy from its heavy crops, its rich pastures, and its veins of metals.” Another tells that on one occasion no less than eight hundred vessels were sent to convey away the corn. It was generally agreed that Britain deserved the title, “Granary of the North.” We may similarly eulogise the Bible. Its fertile and prolific contents may well be a source of surprise. There is always new light and new truth breaking from its pages. It is rich with the most precious and vital truths which have ever come to the human race. It offers endless wealth of blessing to those who live by it. Its ever-fresh pasturelands of divine precept and promise, its rich veins of doctrine and prophecy, its deeps of spiritual revelation, are the joy of all godly souls. It is indeed a land of exhaustless treasure. If there were eight hundred ships came to convey corn from Britain in those far back days, there are tens of thousands who have been coming to this Book through generations, to avail themselves of its incomparable provisions. This is the great storehouse. This is the never-failing granary. This is the endless mine. It is God’s wonder-gift to men; and all men have good cause to wonder at it. It ought to be said of the Bible, as of the “noble six hundred”—“All the world wondered.”

J.S.B.

COMPREHENSIVE STRUCTURE

CONFIRMED in our conviction that the canon of both Old and New Testaments is provenly authentic and complete, we may open and study our Bible with confidence and expectancy, just as it now comes to us in its finalised form. First, we should survey it in its totality. When we do so, four facts quickly emerge as to its nature. The Bible is

1. A book,
2. A record,
3. A revelation,
4. A message.

The Bible a Book.

First, the Bible is a *book*. Although there are no less than sixty-six articles in it, by a plurality of authors widely varying in date, place and circumstance, it is no mere religious melange or sacred miscellany. All sixty-six contributions unite into one book. Can this be demonstrated? Yes. The main evidence is twofold: (a) the masterly *over-all pattern* which unifies all the parts into one symmetrical literary structure; (b) the progressive *unfolding of doctrine* traceable throughout the sixty-six books (in some cases right from Genesis to Revelation) proving a prescient supercontrol of the human penmen, and giving all sixty-six components an onward-moving coherence. In subject after subject, the observable development is like that of an ever-broadening river, or that of a well-planned edifice from foundation to capstone, or that of a wonderful tree, from roots deep-buried in antiquity, up through a mighty trunk of centuries, eventually completing itself in the gracious arms and boughs and leaves of Christopathic healing now outspreading over all five continents.

There is no other such literary phenomenon on earth. Other collections of sacred writings there may be, but where else is there any collection which has accrued through such lapse of centuries and then formed such a

unity amid such diversity? Other collections are at best only anthologies; but the Bible is one *book*.

The Two Testaments: Parallel Structure

OLD TESTAMENT	NEW TESTAMENT
<p>Link back of Israel with pre-Abraham times: Gen. 1-10</p> <p>1. <i>GENETIC: PRIMAL FACTS AND TRUTH</i></p> <p>Five books of Moses: Genesis</p> <p>Exodus</p> <p>Leviticus</p> <p>Numbers</p> <p>Deuteronomy</p> <p>2. <i>HISTORIC: SEQUENCES AND RECORDS</i></p> <p>(a) Israelite: historical books (Joshua to Esther)</p> <p>(b) Individual: experience books (Job to Song of Songs)</p> <p>3. <i>PROPHETIC: FINALISING TEACHINGS</i></p> <p>By Old Covenant prophets</p> <p>Instruction and prediction</p> <p>(a) Major: Isaiah to Daniel</p> <p>(b) Minor: Hosea to Malachi</p>	<p>Link back of Jesus with David and Abraham: Matt. 1: 1-17</p> <p>1. <i>GENETIC: PRIMAL FACTS AND TRUTHS</i></p> <p>Four Memoirs of Jesus:</p> <p>Matthew</p> <p>Mark</p> <p>Luke</p> <p>John</p> <p>2. <i>HISTORIC: RESULTANTS AND RECORDS</i></p> <p>(a) In Israel: “To Jew first” (Acts 1-12)</p> <p>(b) Whole world: “And to Gentile” (Acts 13-28)</p> <p>3. <i>DOCTRINAL: FINALISING TEACHINGS</i></p> <p>By New Covenant apostles</p> <p>Instruction and prediction</p> <p>(a) Church and pastoral epistles</p> <p>(b) General and apocalyptic</p>

The Bible a Record.

The Bible, moreover, is a book of a particular kind. Although in its successive areas we find pedagogy, dialogue, odes, didactic moralism,

prophecy, epistle, all these occur as parts of a *record*. That record is a dichotomy; a record divided into two assemblages, (a) literature of the *Old* Covenant; (b) literature of the *New* Covenant. There are notable contrasts between the two records. The Old is mainly the record of an outcalled *nation*; the New is the record of an outcalled *church*. The one concerns an *earthly* seed, elect in Abraham; the other concerns a *spiritual* seed, elect in Christ. The one tells about a covenant of *law*; the other tells about a covenant of *grace*. The one centres in *Moses*; the other centres in *Jesus*. Never were two records so different *from*, yet so necessary *to* each other as the Old and New Testaments of our Bible. The parallels of contrast and opposites, of type and antitype, of promise and fulfilment, are such that the New answers to the Old like an antiphony, or as “deep calleth unto deep.”

As written records, the Old and New Testaments both have the same ground-plan, and follow the same mould: (1) genetic, (2) historic, (3) prophetic. The Old begins with the Pentateuch, which is *genetic*; that is, it contains the basal or primal facts and truths from which all else later develops. The next part is *historic* (Joshua to Esther) chronicling outgrowing responses and sequences. The final part is *prophetic* (Isaiah to Malachi) which gives finalising teachings within the framework of the Old Covenant.

Similarly the *New* Testament begins with the four Memoirs of Jesus, which are *genetic*, containing the germinal data from which all else outgrows. The next treatise is *historic* (the Acts of the Apostles) recording outreaching repercussions. The remaining area is *prophetic* (Romans to Revelation) in the form of Apostolic letters containing complete teachings within the framework of the New Covenant.

To see this in flat analysis, glance at our diagram on the opposite page, and the feature chart on the next page overleaf.

The Bible a Revelation.

Most vital of all, the Bible is a divine *revelation*. To any open-minded reader it plainly *claims* to be. On closer acquaintance it surely *seems* to be. To an impartial investigation it amply *proves* to be. This needs re-accenting today, when flimsy doubts are common in pulpit and pew. What the Bible records is not man’s groping discovery of God, but God’s gracious

revelation to man. However true the Bible record may be, if it is only a record of religious exploration it has no real *authority*; but if it is indeed divine revelation, then it has *absolute* authority. To the Liberalists it is merely the former. The Neo-Orthodox would fain make it both; but never was any school so fuzzily inconsistent as theirs. To Neo-Orthodoxy the Bible is *not* the Word of God in the clear-cut older sense; yet it *is* the Word of God in the casuistic sense that it *becomes* so through spiritual “encounter”; though even then it is full of mistakes and “unhistoriographical” myths!—which seems to equal: “What isn’t is, yet all the same what is, isn’t!” It reminds us of the caustic French paradox: *le roi est mort; vive le roi!*—“The king is dead; long live the king!” In effect, the Neo-Orthodoxy says, “The Bible, as the directly inspired Word of God, is gone. Long live the Word of God!” If we accept the testimony of the Bible to its own origin, however, then not only is it *genuine* as to its human authorships, and *authentic* as a record of things, but it is *authoritative* as a divine revelation.

Featuristic Correspondences between Old and New Testaments

Features	Old Testament	New Testament
(1) Both Testaments begin with new representative man	Adam, new-created “son of God”	Jesus, incarnated Son of God
(2) Both record the temptation by Satan	Amid beauty and bounty of garden	Amid aridity of a lonely desert
(3) Both have special movement in a called-out people	The elect nation, chosen in Abraham	The elect Church, chosen in Christ
(4) Both record the giving of a new law	Law through Moses (new law of Israel theocracy)	Sermon on Mount (new law, Kingdom of heaven)
(5) Both open up a	Canaan, the land	“All spiritual

promised inheritance	“flowing with milk and honey”	blessings in heavenlies in Christ”
(6) Both tell of failure on the human side	In retrospect, Israel apostate and ejected	In prospect, organised church forewarned of same
(7) Both end with prophecy of a great hope	“Behold, He shall come, saith Jehovah” (Mal. 3: 1)	“Behold, He cometh with clouds. . . (Rev. 1: 7)

The revelation communicated in and by the Bible is *progressive*; not the progress from error to truth, as the Liberalists would say, but from dim dawn to noonday brightness. It is the same divine light which shines through all its pages, but the degree of the light increases as the revelation unfolds.

Bible revelation includes many disclosures, especially of spiritual truths; but supremely it is a revelation of *God*; a revelation unfolded in history, transmitted by inspiration, embodied in literature, and completely presented as the *Bible*.

The Bible a Message.

This is the final aspect: the Bible is a *message*. It is not just a book to be perused, or a record to be believed, or a revelation to be acclaimed, but a message to be *received*. This is its manward objective. It is nothing less than a message from the holy God to fallen humanity. Every part tells a real something which we are meant to learn; and the total says one big thing from God to man which we are meant to apprehend; but the concentration-point of all parts is One in whom the message suddenly becomes *alive* through incarnation. All the earlier parts converge on *Him*. All the later parts interpret *Him*. Focally and finally, He is the message: the Lamb-Lion; the Saviour-King; the Cross and the Crown; a present SALVATION and a coming CHRISTOCRACY.

Literary Architecture.

With the foregoing reflections in mind, take now a panoramic survey of all sixty-six parts, and their “Great Divide” into Old and New Testaments. Each of the two Testaments, the one with its 39 books, and the other with its 27, is arranged in certain homogeneous groups, which collectively betoken an all-inclusive divine design.

OLD TESTAMENT GROUPINGS

First Series.

Take the Old Testament. Beginning with its first book, we find Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Plainly to all, these constitute a fivefold unity which marks them off at once as a separate group. They are all from one pen, that of Moses. They are all historical (though their story includes legislative and organisational tracts). They have always been known as the Five Books of Moses, or the Pentateuch.

Their author: Moses.

Their nature: historical.

Their number: five.

Second Series.

Next come Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther. We instinctively stop at Esther because we are conscious that with the next book, Job, we come to a different category of writing. Joshua to Esther are the twelve which make up the second main group of books in the Old Testament. They are distinctively the “historical” books of the Old Testament.

Their authors: Samuel, seers, scribes.

Their nature: historical.

Their number: twelve.

So then, the first stretch of our Old Testament consists of seventeen historical records, falling into a natural sub-division of five and twelve.

Also, there is a further sub-division in the twelve; for the first nine (Joshua to 2 Chronicles) are records of Israel's *occupancy* of Canaan, while the last three (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther) concern the period after Israel's *expulsion* from the land, and the repatriation of the "Remnant". Thus the seventeen historical books sub-divide themselves into five (pre-Canaan), and nine (in Canaan), and three (post-Exile).

Third Series.

Next we find Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. We need no telling to make another break after the Song of Solomon, for immediately following it is the Book of Isaiah, which introduces yet another class of writings, i.e. that of the prophets. There can be no doubt about it: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Solomon's Song belong together, making the third distinctive group. The preceding seventeen are historical; but these five are individual and *experiential*. The preceding seventeen are national; but these five are *personal*, and deal mainly with the problems of the human heart. The preceding seventeen are all prose; but these five are mainly *poetry*.

Their authors: David, Solomon, others.

Their nature: experiential.

Their number: five.

Fourth Series.

Finally, we come to another stretch of seventeen. This time it is the *prophetical* books: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. These seventeen belong together just as clearly as the seventeen historical books.

Their authors: sixteen prophets.

Their nature: prophetical.

Their number: seventeen.

A remarkable feature is, that just as the seventeen historical books break into five (pre-Canaan), and nine (in Canaan), and three (post-Exile), so now do these seventeen *prophetical* writings. The first five are rightly termed the “*Major Prophets*”, while the remaining twelve (which are classed together as one book in the Jewish canon) are known as the “*Minor Prophets*”.

That this is no artificial distinction a moment’s reflection will show. It is in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel that we find the basic ethical features of all Old Testament prophecy and the comprehensive scheme of Messianic prediction. In Isaiah the coming Messiah is seen both as the suffering Saviour and as the victorious Sovereign who reigns in world empire. In Jeremiah, where we also have Jehovah’s full case against Israel, He is the righteous “Branch” of David, and the ultimate Restorer of the judged and dispersed people. In Ezekiel, looking beyond intermediate judgments, we see Him as the perfect Shepherd-King in whose glorious reign the ideal Temple of the future is erected. In Daniel, who gives us the most particularised programme of times and events in their successive order, we see the Messiah “cut off” without throne or kingdom, yet standing up at last as universal Emperor on the ruins of the crashed Gentile world-system.

The twelve *minor* prophets, though they amplify various aspects, do not determine the main shape of Messianic prophecy; they conform to the general frame already formed for us in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.

Nor let it be thought that the skilful poetic dirge, “Lamentations”, is merely an addendum to “Jeremiah”. Not only does it have the marks of independence and separateness, it monumentalises that towering and tragically significant event, the destruction of Jerusalem, the city upon which Jehovah had set His name; the abruption of the Davidic dynasty; and the scattering of the covenant people in a world-wide dispersion from which even yet, after 2500 years, they have not been regathered, although providentially preserved as a distinct people. “Lamentations” marks a divide between the greatest two of the *pre-Exile* prophets and the greatest two of the *post-Exile* prophets; and in thus dividing them *positionally* in Scripture, it does so by monumentalising the destruction of Jerusalem which divides them *historically*.

Moreover, as the last twelve of the seventeen *historical* books further sub-divide themselves into nine and three, the first nine being *pre-exilic*, and the remaining three (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther) being *post-exilic*, so is it with these twelve “minor” prophets, i.e. the first nine are all *pre-exilic*, while the remaining three (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) are *post-exilic*; and these two terminal trios of the historical and prophetic groups have reciprocal correspondences with each other.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

THREE MAIN GROUPS: SEVEN SUB-GROUPS

HISTORY (17)														EXPERIENCE			PROPHECY (17)																					
BASIC LAW 5				PRE-EXILE RECORDS 9						POST EXILE 3		FIVE: INNER LIFE			BASIC PROPHECY 5				PRE-EXILE MINOR PROPHETS 9						POST EXILE 3													
GENESIS	EXODUS	LEVITICUS	NUMBERS	DEUTERONOMY	JOSHUA	JUDGES	RUTH	1 SAMUEL	2 SAMUEL	1 KINGS	2 KINGS	1 CHRONICLES	2 CHRONICLES	EZRA	NEHEMIAH	ESTHER	JOB	PSALMS	PROVERBS	ECCLESIASTES	SONG OF SONGS	ISAIAH	JEREMIAH	LAMENTATIONS	EZEKIEL	DANIEL	HOSEA	JOEL	AMOS	OBADIAH	JONAH	MICAH	NAHUM	HABAKKUK	ZEPHANIAH	HAGGAI	ZECHARIAH	MALACHI
M	O	S	E	S	C	A	N	A	A	N	A	N	N	A	L	S	H	E	A	R	T	M	A	J	O	R	&	T	W	E	L	V	E	M	I	N	O	R

Thus the 39 books of our Old Testament fall into this orderly grouping of seventeen historical, five experiential, and seventeen prophetic; with both the seventeens sub-grouped into five and nine and three, and the five books which deal with the individual human *heart* placed right between the two seventeens, at the very *heart* of the Old Testament.

Is all this accident or design? Think of it: over thirty writers contributed to the Old Testament, spaced out over twelve hundred years, writing in different places, to different parties, for different purposes, and little dreaming that their writings, besides being preserved through generations, were eventually to be compiled into that systematic plurality in unity which we now call the Old Testament. Are we to be charged with fancifulness for

suspecting that behind the human writers there must have been an already envisaged divine plan?

(See our Mock analysis of Old Testament on preceding page.)

NEW TESTAMENT GROUPS

Gospels and Acts.

We turn to the New Testament now; and here we find equal order, with equally evident design. First we have Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts. These are the only historical treatises of the New Testament; they are foundational to everything which follows; and clearly therefore they belong together.

Their authors: as named.

Their nature: historical.

Their number: five.

Christian Church Epistles.

Next comes a group which just as plainly coheres as one subsidiary whole. It is that group of epistles which are all addressed to *Christian churches*: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

Their author: Paul.

Their nature: doctrinal.

Their number: nine.

Pastoral Epistles.

Now come four epistles which are an inseparable quartette in themselves, namely, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon. These four are not written to Christian Churches, but to Christian *pastors* (for even Philemon seems to have been leader or pastor of a church which met in his own home: see Philemon, verse 2).

Their author: Paul.
Their nature: doctrinal.
Their number: four.

Christian Hebrew Epistles.

Finally, we have another group of nine, that is, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 and 2 and 3 John, Jude, Revelation (which is really an epistle of our Lord Himself through John: see opening verse). These nine are not addressed to Christian churches, as the other nine are, nor is there anything in them about the organised Church or the Church mystical. The first of them (Hebrews) is obviously directed to the Hebrew nation as such. James, likewise, addresses “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad”. Peter addresses “the sojourners of the dispersion” (i.e. the Jews of the dispersion). The Third Epistle of John indicates its Hebrew standpoint in verse 7 which refers to Gentiles as distinct from those to whom John was writing; and the Hebrew flavour of Jude and Revelation is clear to all. So then, these nine are distinctively Hebrew in standpoint and atmosphere, and are rightly called the Christian Hebrew Epistles.

Their authors: as indicated.
Their nature: doctrinal.
Their number: nine.

A Literary Archway.

Thus our New Testament consists of five historical books, making a solid, fivefold slab of basic fact beneath our feet. Then, rising up on each side, like two beautifully wrought pillars, are the nine Christian Church Epistles and the nine Christian Hebrew Epistles; and these two ninefold pillars are connected and arched by the four Pastoral Epistles, the whole making a symmetrical archway of truth into the Church of Christ and the Kingdom of God, and reaching its high vertex in that transcendent epitome of Christian truth, “Great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” Yes, by its literary

structure, the New Testament is a wonderful archway into saving truth and everlasting blessedness.

The comparative and contrastive parallels between the two ninefold groups of epistles is a study all in itself. Both groups begin with a great doctrinal treatise, Romans and Hebrews respectively. Both groups end with an eschatological unveiling, 1 and 2 Thessalonians in the one case, and the Book of Revelation in the other. Romans, at the beginning of the first group, shows us, irrespective of nationality, that salvation by Christ is the *only* way. Hebrews, at the beginning of the second group, has primary reference to the nation Israel, and shows that salvation through Christ is the *better* way. In Thessalonians, at the end of the first nine, we see the second coming of Christ especially in relation to the *Church*. In Revelation, at the end of the second nine, we see the second coming of Christ especially in relation to Israel and the nations. We might elaborate this much further, but for the moment must forbear.

This presence of plan and design not only pertains to the Bible in this general way; it runs through all the subsidiary groups of books, as we shall see; and the more *we* follow it through in detail, so the more persuasive it becomes, until all possibility of its being mere chance is eliminated by abundance of evidence to the contrary.

Perhaps someone may scornfully ask, “Are you seriously teaching that God arranged His Word into specific *numerical* groups—of seventeens and fives and nines?” On that particular point we are not exactly “*teaching*” anything. This is one of those phenomena which either speak for themselves, or it is useless to speak for them at all. We make no dogmatic assertion. As to logical system and progress of *subject-matter* in both Testaments, who would dare deny? The orderly groupings are *there*—unmistakably demarcated in category and literary form, for all to see. What do *you* really think? Maybe our ensuing chapters will help toward a verdict.

OLD TESTAMENT PANORAMA

Some years ago, from the platform of a religious meeting in Edinburgh, Scotland, a highbrow young preacher waxed vainly vehement in supposedly discrediting different parts of the Bible. When he finished, a seasoned old minister who followed him said, "Friends, we have all been more or less interested and not a little dismayed by our young brother's critical surgery on our dear old Bible. As I listened to him, my mind's eye seemed to see all the sixty-six books of the Bible stand up together and call to him, in the words of Acts 16: 28, "DO THYSELF NO HARM; FOR WE ARE ALL HERE."

J.S.B.

OLD TESTAMENT PANORAMA

STRUCTURAL system in the Bible not only comprehends the sixty-six books collectively, it extends to the constituent groups, and to their individual members. It embraces the whole, and persists through all the parts.

THE PENTATEUCH.

A first instance of this appears in the Pentateuch. Those first five books of Moses not only give us a synoptic retrospect covering the first two thousand five hundred years of human history; in their main features they set forth what has been called “the order of the experience of God’s people in all ages”.

In Genesis we see *ruin* through the sin of man; in Exodus *redemption* through the blood of the Lamb; in Leviticus, *communion* on the ground of atonement; in Numbers, *direction* during pilgrimage, by the pillar of cloud and fire; in Deuteronomy, renewed and completed *instruction*, and the pilgrim people brought to the predetermined destination. Is not that indeed “the order of the experience of God’s people in all ages”?

Again, in their central emphases, those first five books of Moses give us a fivefold revelation of God in His relationship with His people. In Genesis we see especially the *sovereignty* of God, in creation, in history, in election and predestination (in His choosing of Abram, Isaac, Jacob, and their posterity, and covenanting the land of Canaan to them). In Exodus we see the redeeming *power* of God, in His deliverance of Israel from Egypt “with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm”. In Leviticus we see the *holiness* of God, in His insistence on the sanctification of His redeemed people. In Numbers we see the “*goodness and severity*” of God; severity toward the unbelieving generation which came up from Egypt but never entered Canaan; goodness toward their children, in protecting, providing, preserving. In Deuteronomy we see the *faithfulness* of God; faithful to His promise, His purpose, His people, in at last bringing the redeemed to the covenanted inheritance.

When one reflects on it, those five successive emphases indicate the one safe order in which sinful man may come to know God; first God’s utter sovereignty in nature and grace; then His almighty power to overthrow or to deliver; then His

sin-abhorring holiness; then His “goodness and severity”; and finally His undeserved but persevering *love* (the love of God is not mentioned until Deuteronomy: see 7: 7; 10: 15). It may be useful to contract all this into a frame:

PENTATEUCH: SALIENT SIGNIFICANCES

The Five Scrolls	Manward Aspects	Godward Aspects
Genesis	<i>Ruin</i> – through human transgression	Divine <i>sovereignty</i> —in creation and election.
Exodus	<i>Redemption</i> – by “the blood of the Lamb”	Divine <i>power</i> – redemption and emancipation
Leviticus	<i>Communion</i> – on the ground of atonement.	Divine <i>holiness</i> – in demand for sanctification.
Numbers	<i>Direction</i> – by supernatural guidance	Divine “ <i>goodness and severity</i> ” – judging, preserving.
Deuteronomy	<i>Destination</i> – through divine faithfulness	Divine <i>love</i> (Deut. 7: 7) in covenant promise.
<i>These five books are the whole Bible in miniature.</i>	<i>This is “the order of experience” among God’s pilgrims in all ages.</i>	<i>This is the order in which alone it is safe for man to learn of God.</i>

Those first five books of the Bible not only give us the origin of Adamic humanity, and of the present cosmic system, and of our race’s ethnic divisions; they unfold to us five “firsts” of the *moral* realm, which we do well to ponder. Genesis exposes the *first sin*, which robbed man of his sceptre and entailed death, both physical and spiritual. Exodus dramatises the *first need* of fallen man—salvation from slavery. Leviticus objectifies the *first effects* of salvation—dedication, purity, fellowship. Numbers photographs the *first stages* of salvation—pilgrimage experiences of earthly emergency and divine sufficiency. Deuteronomy enunciates the *first essentials* of inheritance and possession—complete obedience and loyal service.

Or, as it may be alternatively expressed, in those five books of Moses we have the five most fundamental spiritual truths which man needs to learn. We may call them the five basic “D’s”.

Genesis:	Destitution, in himself.
Exodus:	Deliverance in God alone.
Leviticus:	Dedication to God's way.
Numbers:	Direction by God's will.
Deuteronomy:	Discipline by God's Word.

Thus, those first five books of the Old Testament are full of purpose and progress. So remarkably do they anticipate and epitomise the message of Scripture as a whole, that with ample reason they have been called "the Bible in miniature".

THE TWELVE: JOSHUA TO ESTHER

What of the twelve remaining historical writings in our Old Testament, Joshua to Esther? I am not fond of using theatrical terms in relation to Biblical or spiritual realities; but these twelve historical records constitute a *drama*. My dictionary gives three definitions of "drama", and the third is: "A series of real events having dramatic unity and interest." So there may be historical as well as merely theatrical drama; and, in that sense, these twelve narratives depict the most wonderful, tragic, long-drawn-out drama of national history ever enacted or recorded. Certainly no other was ever so big with meaning for nations and individuals. Side by side the human and the divine travel on, through scene after scene, with most momentous lessons for all beholders. It is a strange cruelty to read mere snatches, just now and then. The whole thing should be read right through, again and again. There is nothing in Shakespeare to match it. The whole thing is *alive* with divine revelation through vivid human interplay, episode, climacteric, and tragic finale.

Keep the complete historical picture of the Old Testament clearly before the mental eye:

PREPARATION—(Genesis to Deuteronomy)

OCCUPATION—(Joshua to 2 Chronicles)

DISPOSSESSION—(Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther)

And now, quickly but observantly, scan the twelve as a series. In the Book of Joshua we have *possession*. Israel at last crosses Jordan into Canaan. The conquest moves in three stages: chapters 1 to 5, *entering*; chapters 6 to 12, *overcoming*; chapters 13 to 24, *occupying*.

The Book of Judges follows, alas, with a very different report: six apostasies into idolatry, punished by six servitudes to neighbour kingdoms, intermittently relieved by divine interventions which, however, did not cure Israel's philandering. The sickening repetition all through is *declension*.

Then comes First Samuel, the differentiating feature of which is the fateful *transition* from theocracy to monarchy, and the anointing of Saul as first king. It was no mere rabble outcry which brought about the transition, but the cogitated application of Israel's elders (1 Sam. 8: 4, 5); and the underlying seriousness of it was expressed in God's word to Samuel: "They have rejected *ME*, that *I* should not reign over them" (8: 7). So, First Samuel is the book of the *transition*.

Next comes Second Samuel, the book of David's forty-year reign. It brings us the big surprise of God's entering into sworn covenant with David (see chapter 7); and we find that the throne which was rejected in Saul is now confirmed in David. Yes, that is the big thing in Second Samuel—*confirmation*.

This brings us to First Kings, the book of the *disruption*. After the death of Solomon, ten of the tribes break away to form a separate kingdom, with the shrewd, unscrupulous Jeroboam as first king; and from then onwards the national deterioration is accelerated. First Kings is the book of the *disruption*; the disruption of the one kingdom into two.

This is followed by even sadder developments in Second Kings. After the disruption, the ten-tribed kingdom lasted only 250 years, under 19 kings, all of which did "evil in the sight of the Lord". The Judah kingdom lasted 390 years (after the disruption), under twenty kings of varying calibre, but with a general national deterioration. In both cases, moral corruption and infidelity to Jehovah eventually reached an intolerable extreme; so that in 721 B.C. the ten-tribed kingdom was dispersed in the Assyrian exile, from which there has never been a return; and in 587 B.C. the Judah kingdom was dispersed in the Babylonian exile, from which only a "Remnant" returned, fifty-one years later. Thus, the Second Book of Kings is the heart-break book of the *dispersion*.

Next, we have the two books of the Chronicles, in which the whole story is *recapitulated*. The Chronicles are no mere repetition, but an interpretative retrospect. The story which, in the Books of the Kings, has been told from the standpoint of the throne, is now reviewed from the standpoint of the temple; and the great lesson in retrospect is, that *response to God is the determining factor in national history*. So, then, in 1 & 2 Chronicles there is interpretative *retrospect*.

Finally, we have the three little post-exilic books, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, each of which has its own conspicuous emphasis. In Ezra we have *restoration*. By decree of emperor Cyrus, in 536 B.C., and under the leadership of Zerubbabel,

the fifty thousand (the Jewish “Remnant”) are restored from exile to their Judean homeland.

In Nehemiah we have *reconstruction*. Under royal edict of Artaxerxes, in 445 B.C., Nehemiah comes as new governor, to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Then comes the Esther epic, with its complete emphasis, *preservation*. It concerns the large mass of the exiled and scattered Jews (most of whom did *not* later return to Judea with the “Remnant”). A wily plot is hatched in the palace of Persia’s mighty Xerxes to exterminate the Jews throughout all the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of an empire extending from Ethiopia to India. But, by a hidden hand of providential overruling, the plot is turned back ironically on its spiteful inventor, and the Jews are saved.

Look back again now, over the whole twelve acts in this big-scale drama, and mark the eventful new turn in each.

Joshua	<i>Possession</i>
Judges; Ruth	<i>Declension</i>
First Samuel	<i>Transition</i>
Second Samuel	<i>Confirmation</i>
First Kings	<i>Disruption</i>
Second Kings	<i>Dispersion</i>
Chronicles	<i>Retrospection</i>
Ezra	<i>Restoration</i>
Nehemiah	<i>Reconstruction</i>
Esther	<i>Preservation</i>

These, then, are the successive movements in the Jehovah-Israel-Canaan drama; and we should learn to see the whole thing in its significant procession. See the dominating moral truth, or spiritual *message*, going with each of the parts:

Joshua	Faith in God overcomes and possesses.
Judges: Ruth	Compromise always brings enslavements.
First Samuel	Choosing better instead of best is retrograde.
Second	Even a David cannot sin without

Samuel	suffering.
First Kings	Abused privilege always courts disaster.
Second Kings	Implacable sinning brings woeful retribution.
1 & 2 Chronicle	Look back: learn the lesson. <i>RESPONSE TO GOD THE DETERMINING FACTOR.</i>
Ezra	There is always a way back for the repentant.
Nehemiah	Faith can rebuild what sin has destroyed.
Esther	God in the shadows ever watches His own.

What a drama! What scenes! What actors! What incidents! What lessons! In these twelve books we see demonstrated on a national scale, and moving through centuries, the truth of Solomon's proverb: "The way of transgressors is hard"; and of Paul's words: "The wages of sin is death." Here in vivid lines of poetic justice we see that flagrant sinning and flouted warning bring ruin without remedy. As we watch the battered, broken tribes of Israel, dragged behind the chariots of their heathen conquerors, we cannot but see dramatised in tears and blood the inexorable truth that inexcusable wrong brings inescapable wrath. The greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility. The deeper the guilt, the heavier the stroke. Correction may be resisted, but retribution cannot be evaded. "How shall we escape if we neglect . . ." "God is not mocked: whatsoever a nation soweth, that shall it also reap." But we also see the rainbow through the dark thunderstorm. There is a way back. God waits to receive and restore. He stands in the shadows; watching, waiting, welcoming. Yes, what a drama!

JOB TO SOLOMON'S SONG

And now, leaving the historical books, we come to a sharply contrastive set; the five so-called "philosophy" books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon.

The seventeen books which now lie behind are *historical*; these five are *experiential*. The seventeen historical books are concerned with a *nation* as such;

these five are concerned with *individuals* as such. The preceding seventeen have to do with the *Hebrew race*; these five have to do with the *human heart*. The seventeen are *prose*; these five are mainly *poetical*.

These five compositions are not the *only* poetry in the Old Testament. There are stretches of unexcelled poetry elsewhere, especially in the writings of the prophets; yet these five are distinctively the poetical *group*.

Nor must we think that because they are poetical they are simply the product of human imagination. That term, “poetical” refers only to their *form*. These books portray real human experience, and grapple with profound problems, and express big realities. Especially do they concern themselves with the experiences of the *godly*, amid the varying vicissitudes of this changeful life which is ours under the sun.

Can there be pre-designed order and progress even in *this* little group? Well, let us see.

First comes the Book of Job, in which we see *the death of the self-life*. Through the fires of affliction and a new vision of God, Job is brought to the end of himself. He sees himself as God sees him. The self-life, with its self-goodness and self-reason and self-religion and self-everything, is laid bare and laid low. The man who at first is said to have been the best man on earth (1: 8), is found at last on his face before God, exclaiming, “I abhor myself in dust and ashes”! (42: 6).

Next, in the Psalms, we see *the new life in God*, expressing itself in praise and prayer, in adoration and supplication and intercession, in faith and hope and love, in fear and joy and song and sigh, and in every frame which godly hearts know.

Then come the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. In Proverbs we are in God’s school, learning a heavenly but practical wisdom for life on earth; while in Ecclesiastes we are taught not to set our affection too fondly on anything under the sun, but to let our treasure be on high, because God has “set eternity” in the human heart (Eccles. 3: 11). Finally, the Song of Songs completes the progress by symbolically expressing the sweet intimacy of communion with Christ in the experienced fulness of His love. Proverbs gives the *practical* aspect; Ecclesiastes the *philosophical* aspect; Solomon’s Song the *spiritual* aspect.

In these five books, then, we have the death of the old life in “self”; the flame of the new life in God; the practical disciplining of the soul in the school of godliness; the weaning of the heart from inordinate worldly desires; and the rapture of communion with the heavenly Bridegroom. Is not that a beautiful spiritual progress?

It is worth observing, also, that this beautiful progress in the order of those poetical books is the necessary order in true Christian experience. That which the Song of Songs represents can *never* be experienced until that which is represented in the Book of Job has been experienced. Death is peaceful enough; but *dying* is often very hard. The self-life seldom if ever dies without a struggle; but the “nevertheless afterward” of unclouded fellowship with the risen Christ makes rich compensation!

Leading Ideas

We have seen how, in the seventeen historical books, the distinctive feature of each book is so clear that it may be expressed in a single word. Similarly, with each of these five poetical books, the ruling idea may be concentrated into a single phrase.

Book of Job	Blessing through Suffering.
The Psalms	Praise through Prayer.
The Proverbs	Prudence through Precept.
Ecclesiastes	Verity through Vanity.
Song of Songs	Bliss through Divine Love.

Is not that indeed delightful progress?—and how true it is to human experience!

THE PROPHETICAL BOOKS

This brings us to the seventeen *prophetical* books, which comprise the final roll of Old Testament writings. Each one is a complete entity in itself, yet all seventeen cohere into one integral unity. There are the five “major” and the twelve “minor”. Look again at the former: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel. What is the focal emphasis, the big thing which each is trying to say to us? Certain things they all have in common, as for instance, their powerful reference to the divine *sovereignty*; to the guilt and punishment and eventual restoration of Israel; and to the ultimate world-rule of the Messiah. But they also have special “distinctives”.

In *Isaiah*, chapter 6 is the decisive pivot. Hitherto the prophet’s range has been confined to Judah; but now he has a vision of Jehovah which transforms his whole outlook, and widens his prophetic range until it takes in all nations, the

whole world, and all history. The high point of Isaiah's vision is his awed exclamation, "*Mine eyes have seen the King—Jehovah of Hosts!*" Isaiah now sees Jehovah as King of all nations; the universal Emperor who holds all the convulsions of earth in His own omnipotent grip and purpose. Jehovah is *the God who rules all history*.

That same Jehovah reappears in *Jeremiah*, just the same, yet how different! It was eighty or a hundred years after Isaiah that Jeremiah prophesied, when Judah was pitching with headlong wickedness to weltering ruin, to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the mournful catastrophe of the Exile. Jeremiah was the prophet of Judah's midnight hour. His message all through was, that although Jehovah's love for His people was unchanged He could not, and would not spare. Judah's *sin* to the full should be requited by *wrath* to the full. Jeremiah's message is crystallised in chapter 26: 12, 13, "Jehovah sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city. . . . Therefore now amend your ways . . . and Jehovah will repent Him of the evil that He hath pronounced against you." This was a gracious eleventh-hour offer, but it was despised; and there fell upon Judah a shattering judgment which left proud Jerusalem a tangled heap of ruins and corpses, and the impenitent survivors slaves to their Babylonian masters. Jeremiah, the last of the pre-Exile prophets, lived to see it; and with a broken heart he memorialised it in the elegant but tragic elegy which we call "Lamentations". Beyond all doubt, this is the solemn knell which tolls through Jeremiah: Jehovah is *the God who avenges iniquity*.

(As noted in our preceding chapter, "Lamentations", which follows Jeremiah, marks the "big divide" between the two *pre-Exile* prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the two *post-Exile* prophets: Ezekiel, Daniel. It marks that towering tragedy, the destruction of Jerusalem—the city upon which Jehovah had set His Name; the aborting of the Davidic dynasty; and the scattering of the covenant people in a world-wide, ages-long dispersion).

What of *Ezekiel*? The opening vision, like a ritornelle, gives an advance answer. The prophet sees a "whirlwind" and a "great cloud" and a "fire unfolding itself", coming "out of the north" (1: 4). These are symbols of coming judgment (2: 9, 10). Then "four living creatures", emerge, who prove to be the heavenly cherubim (10: 1-22). Each has four faces: lion, ox, man, eagle, symbolising strength at its greatest, service at its meekest, intelligence at its fullest and spirituality at its highest; and the four faces of each look, respectively, north, south, east, west, seeing everything. Their appearance is "like burning coals of fire" —utter holiness; and they run as "a flash of lightning"—sheer swiftness.

But now, a strange new marvel: four vast, awesome “wheels”, one beside each cherub (16), with an immense circumference reaching from heaven to earth, and connecting those heavenly beings with this world of ours. And a further curious feature: each wheel is criss-cross—“a wheel within a wheel”, one revolving north-south, the other east-west; so that neither cherubs nor wheels ever need to turn as they run with lightning speed between heaven and earth (9, 12, 17); and the vast rims of the wheels are “full of eyes” (18) looking simultaneously in every direction! Strangest of all: the *life* of the cherubs is in the *wheels* (20) so that the wheels express with exquisite exactitude the will of those heavenly beings! Moreover, as the wheels join earth with heaven, so the cherubim connect the wheels with the very throne of God.

Climactically, Ezekiel suddenly hears a voice from the firmament above the cherubim (25), and, on looking up, sees “the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone”. On the throne is the fire-enveloped Supreme!

The meaning of all this symbolism is clear: coming judgments; but behind and above them, those vast, awesome, all-seeing wheels of the divine government; and those flaming cherubs, the mighty, super-intelligent executives of the divine will. The purpose is to show that *behind the events which take place on earth are the operations of supernatural powers in heaven; and above all is the overruling will and purpose of the infinite Jehovah Himself.*

The whole Book of Ezekiel ties in with this opening vision of the Jehovah who *overrules*. The focal message confronts us on almost every page. No less than seventy times we find the refrain, “They shall know that I am Jehovah” (in connection with judgment on Jerusalem, 29 times; judgment on Gentile nations, 24; final blessing of the elect nation, 17). That is the grand idea: through all permitted happenings Jehovah makes Himself known. Jehovah is *the God who overrules all events*.

When we turn to the Book of *Daniel*, the distinguishing peculiarity is just as marked. The first six chapters are narration; the remaining six are prediction. The key to part one is given three times over in chapter 4: 17, 25, 32: “*That the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will.*” In part two the emphasis is on the wonderful world-kingdom of Messiah, the “Son of Man” in the end-time of history (7: 9-14, 27, 28; 9: 20-27). The prophecy of the “seventy weeks” in chapter 9 is one of the most remarkable in the Bible. “Know therefore and understand that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks . . . and after the threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off. . . .” The late Sir

Robert Anderson, in his brilliant book, *The Coming Prince*, showed how this chronological prediction was fulfilled to the very day, from 14th March, 445 B.C. to 6th April, A.D. 32. As in none of the other prophets, here in Daniel we find the great world-empires of the pre-Christian era actually predicted in their successive order, along with concomitant circumstances of their rise and fall: Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece (under Alexander), Rome.¹ Clearly, in Daniel, we are meant to see *the “Most High” who foreplans the future*.

So, then, with these “distinctives” in mind, mark the impressive order here:

Isaiah *The King who governs all history.*

Jeremiah *The Judge who avenges iniquity.*

Ezekiel *The Jehovah who overrules all events.*

Daniel *The Most High who foreplans the future.*

But now look at the divine paradoxes presented in these “major” prophets. The prophecies of *Isaiah* are in two main series (1 to 35, and 40 to 66). In the first series the key is chapter 6, in which Isaiah sees Jehovah as *King* on the throne of heaven. In the second series the centre-point is chapter 53, in which Isaiah sees the *Lamb*. John 12: 38, 41, and Acts 8: 32-35, tell us that in both instances Isaiah was seeing the pre-incarnate Christ! The wonder is, that the Jehovah who rules the universe (chapter 6) becomes the Lamb who bleeds for sinners (chapter 53). *The God who rules is the God who saves!*

As for *Jeremiah*, all the way through we see the prophet objectifying the truth that Jehovah suffers with those whom He chastises; but the outstanding paradox is, that *the God who scatters is the God who regathers* (see chapters 23: 3-8; 29: 11-14; 30: 8-11; 31: 3-14, 27-40). That is Jeremiah’s favourite harp-string.

In *Ezekiel*, a pronounced singularity is the departure of “the glory of Jehovah”, first from the holy of holies to the temple *threshold* (9: 3); then from the threshold to the upbearing *cherubim* (10: 18); then right out of Jerusalem to *Mount Olives* (11: 23). The tragic meaning is clear: the harlot city now becomes Godforsaken. Yet turn on to chapter 43: 2-5, and see how, in the temple yet to be, the “glory of the God of Israel” *returns* and fills the house! *The God who withdraws, at last returns!*

Another outstanding feature in Ezekiel is that Jehovah eventually becomes “sanctified” in Israel *before all nations*. “I will sanctify My great name which ye have profaned . . . and the *nations* shall know that I am Jehovah when I shall be

sanctified in you *before their eyes*” (36: 23; 20: 41; 28: 25; 39: 27). God had chosen Israel to be a theocratic revelation of Himself to other nations, but Israel had ignominiously fouled the covenant until God had left the inveterate idolaters to savage spoilers. Ironically, divine *election* had now become divine *ejection*; for the God who had chosen them as “*sons*” had now scattered them as *slaves*! In the eyes of other nations, Israel’s failure was *Jehovah’s* failure, and His name was accordingly dishonoured. But Ezekiel shows us Jehovah, through centuries, turning this failure into an ultimate triumph bigger than earth and longer than time! The very last verse of the book tells us of a *new* Jerusalem bearing the name, *JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH*—“Jehovah is *there*” (48: 35). Yes, the God who loses, wins! Out of dismal failure—final glory!

The paradoxes in the Book of *Daniel* are arresting. Jehovah, shamefully dishonoured in His own city of Jerusalem, becomes honoured and extolled in Babylon as the “God of gods” and “King of heaven” (2: 47; 3: 28, 29; 4: 37), and all nations marvel at Jehovah, the God of Daniel. We see, also, that the God who *permits* is the God who *protects*. He may permit Israel to suffer for sin; but He protects His Daniels from the lions, and His Shadrachs from the fiery furnace. He may permit Gentile world-powers like ravening beasts to devour, but He preserves His elect “Remnant” through the centuries until the “Son of Man” descends with “the clouds of heaven”, and absorbs “all peoples, nations, languages” in a globe-girdling kingdom which shall “never be destroyed” (7: 1-14).

See now the developing pattern of these “major” prophets in sharp outline on the next page.

THE MINOR PROPHETS

To give a resume of these twelve minor prophets, one after the other, would much exceed our present limits. For a fuller exposition we refer the reader to volume 4 of our larger work: *Explore the Book*. What we *can* do here, and all that we *need* to do for our present purpose, is to single out the focal impress or peculiar emphasis of each; for undoubtedly each one *has* its own “differential”.

THE MAJOR PROPHETS

ISAIAH	JEREMIAH	LAMENTATIONS	EZEKIEL	DANIEL
THE KING	THE JUDGE	THE BIG DIVIDE	THE	THE MOST

WHO GOVERNS ALL HISTORY	WHO AVENGES INIQUITY	<p>BETWEEN Pre-Exile and Post-Exile</p> <p>JERUSALEM IS FALLEN!</p>	SUPREME WHO OVERRULES ALL	HIGH WHO FOREPLANS
THE GOD WHO RULES AND SAVES	THE GOD WHO SCATTERS YET REGATHERS		THE GOD WHO WITHDRAWS YET RETURNS	THE GOD WHO PERMITS BUT PROTECTS
THE KING (LION) BECOMES SAVIOUR (LAMB)	JEHOVAH SUFFERS WITH THOSE HE CHASTISES		OUT OF HUMAN FAILURE GOD BRINGS FINAL GLORY	OTHER KINGDOMS NOW; BUT MESSIAH'S KINGDOM AT LAST
NOTE: Many of Isaiah's predictions relate to the Exile and after; but he himself lived 150 years before the Exile	Jeremiah prophesied for forty years before the Exile; and right down to the Exile; but not after it.		Ezekiel was deported to Babylon eleven years before the Exile, but his prophesying was not completed till the post-Exile period.	Daniel was carried to Babylon some nineteen years before the Exile, but like Ezekiel is rightly called post-Exile as a prophet.

Hosea

Hosea prophesied during the awful “last lap” in Israel’s downward drive. Idolatry was everywhere, with child-sacrifices and revolting licentiousness. Jehovah worship was all but gone. Loyalty to the throne had given place to treachery. National self-reliance had broken down. “They call to Egypt, they go to Assyria”—fluttering as a startled bird. Hosea is the prophet of *outraged but persevering love*. Here is the love which, although it flames with indignation at

sin, sobs out, “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel?” So then, in Hosea Jehovah is *the God who loves to the uttermost*.

Joel

Joel is the prophet of *eleventh-hour* appeal. Already calamities had fallen because of sin (1: 1-20) and bigger requital was coming, unless . . . (2: 1-11). God would not let culminating judgment fall without an eleventh-hour appeal: “Yet *even now*, saith Jehovah, turn ye to Me . . . and I will restore” (2: 12-27). Jehovah is *the God who appeals before punishing*.

Amos

The Amos prophecy consists of eight “burdens” (1-2), three sermons (3-6), five “visions” (7-9). Its theme all through is that *Jehovah will not spare the oft-warned*. See how each “burden” begins with the words, “For three transgressions, and for four” (1: 3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2: 1, 4, 6). See also, “Yet have ye not returned” (4: 6, 8, 9, 10, 11). That is the Amos emphasis: Jehovah eventually *saves no more* the oft-warned (8: 2).

Obadiah

This prophetic fragment has one theme only: judgment on Edom. The key verse is 15: “As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee”. We are meant to see that there is a principle of “poetic justice” operative in the divine government of earth’s peoples. See this idea of poetic justice worked out in verse after verse. Edom had indulged in treachery against Judah (11, 12), therefore Edom should perish through the treachery of confederates (7); and so on. Yes, Jehovah is *the God who judges with poetic exactness!*

Jonah

Both Jonah and his story are regrettably misunderstood. Although the incident concerns Nineveh, the story itself is a message to Israel. The reason for Jonah’s objecting to warn Nineveh was not hatred of Gentiles, but concern to save *Israel* from wicked Nineveh. Jonah is the central figure until the closing paragraph, where the prominence is transferred to Jehovah Himself, and the supreme message of the incident is uttered: Jonah must learn that God’s special favour to Israel did not mean lessened love and concern for other peoples. Even

wicked Nineveh must be warned; for Jehovah is *the God who spares the repentant*.

Micah

Micah is the prophet of present judgment (1-3) but future blessing (4-5). The big truth is that even in wounding, God is faithful, and has eventual good as the goal. Note the sharp contrasts between “Now . . . now . . . now . . . now” in chapter 4: 9, 10, 11; 5: 1, in contrast with “*Until*” in 5: 3. So, in Micah, Jehovah is *the God who judges in order to bless*.

Nahum

Nahum’s vehement oracle tolls the knell over Nineveh, the world’s greatest city, and capital of the Assyrian empire. A century earlier, Nineveh had learned through Jonah that “Jehovah is slow to anger”. Since then she had presumed, and gone to extremes of vileness. She must now learn the full truth: “Jehovah is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit” (1: 3). Let all now learn through Nineveh that Jehovah is *the God who cannot be mocked* (1: 11-14).

Habakkuk

The focus is Babylon, but the message is to *the godly*. Jehovah was about to punish Judah, but by an even wicked nation. That was the big enigma. Habakkuk now learns the wonderful divine guarantee: “*The just shall live by his faith*” (2: 4). Though God uses Babylon to chastise Judah, Babylon too should be brought low at last. Meanwhile, although the godly suffer with the wicked, yet they shall never perish in the end like the wicked, but shall live because of their faith, as will yet be seen, for “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah” (2: 14). Thus, in Habakkuk, Jehovah is *the God who vindicates the righteous*.

Zephaniah

Despite reforms under godly king Josiah, the stream of iniquity flowed unstemmed in Judah; but before the culminating storm of retribution was unleashed God sent Zephaniah to say: “I have cut off the nations; their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by; their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, and there is none inhabitant. I said: Surely [in

view of all this] thou [Jerusalem] wilt fear Me, thou wilt receive instruction . . . but they rose early and corrupted all their doings . . . therefore . . . I rise to the prey” (3: 6-8). In Zephaniah, Jehovah is *the God who avenges abused privilege*.

Haggai

In Haggai, the first of the repatriation prophets, the centre-point is chapter 2: 15-19, “Consider from this day and upward . . . from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month . . . from this day will I bless you.” That twenty-fourth day of Chisleu, 520 B.C., marked the end of the seventy years’ servitude period. Judgments were over. New blessing was now being released on the “Remnant”. Jehovah is *the God who restores lost blessing*.

Zechariah

The Book of Zechariah is in two main parts. Part one (1-8) consists of a sevenfold vision and a fourfold message. Part two (9-14) is a Messianic prophecy in three movements. Both parts begin with the same key-emphasis. “Thus saith Jehovah: I am [become] jealous for Zion [again]: I am returned unto Jerusalem with mercies” (1: 14-16 and 8: 1-3). Jehovah is to the Remnant *the God who returns with new mercies*.

Malachi

From beginning to end this last Old Testament prophecy is an *appeal*; an appeal to repent of sin and return to God; an appeal accompanied by rich promise and stern warning. The appeal finds focus in chapter 3: 10, “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse . . . and prove Me now . . .” Thus the Old Testament closes with Jehovah as *the God of gracious challenge and patient appeal*.

Thus, in these twelve Minor Prophets, we have twelve photographic aspects, each special in its own way, yet all contributing to the full picture of the all-glorious Jehovah.

Hosea	The God who loves to the uttermost.
Joel	The God who appeals before smiting.
Amos	The God who requites the oft-warned.
Obadiah	The God who judges with poetic irony.
Jonah	The God who spares repentant sinners.

Micah	The God who smites in order to bless.
Nahum	The God who is never mocked or eluded.
Habakkuk	The God who vindicates the righteous.
Zephaniah	The God who avenges abused privilege.
Haggai	The God who restores lost blessings.
Zechariah	The God who returns with new mercies.
Malachi	The God who still says, “Prove Me now.”

Incidentals

Of the enemies which afflicted the covenant people long ago, three were outstanding—the Edomites, the Assyrians, the Babylonians. It was given to three of these “minor” prophets specially to pronounce the doom of those three powers. The prophecy of Obadiah sealed the fate of Edom. The prophecy of Nahum tolled the knell over Assyria. The prophecy of Habakkuk dug the grave of Babylon.

It is worth noting that these twelve prophets “belong” in four trios. Three of them were messengers to the northern kingdom, *Israel*. Three of them were messengers to the southern kingdom, *Judah*. Three of them (at least in these prophecies) were concerned with *Gentile* nations. The remaining three were post-Exilic messengers to the returned “*Remnant*”. Thus:

To <i>Israel</i>	Hosea, Amos, Jonah.
To <i>Judah</i>	Joel, Micah, Zephaniah.
To <i>Gentiles</i>	Obadiah (Edom), Nahum (Nineveh) Habakkuk (Babylon).
To <i>Remnant</i>	Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

Such, then, is the Old Testament. Is it not *a*, marvel of diversity in a developing unity? Is it not stamped with the presence of divine design throughout?

OLD TESTAMENT: KEY IDEAS

Genesis	<i>Ruin</i>
Exodus	<i>Redemption</i>
Leviticus	<i>Communion</i>

	Numbers	<i>Direction</i>	
	Deuteronomy	<i>Destination</i>	
Joshua	<i>Possession</i>	Second Kings	<i>Dispersion</i>
Judges, Ruth	<i>Declension</i>	1 & 2 Chronicles	<i>Retrospection</i>
First Samuel	<i>Transition</i>	Ezra	<i>Restoration</i>
Second Samuel	<i>Confirmation</i>	Nehemiah	<i>Reconstruction</i>
First Kings	<i>Disruption</i>	Esther	<i>Preservation</i>
	Job	<i>Blessing through suffering</i>	
	Psalms	<i>Praising through praying</i>	
	Proverbs	<i>Prudence through precept</i>	
	Ecclesiastes	<i>Verity through vanity</i>	
	Songs of Songs	<i>Bliss through divine love</i>	
Isaiah	<i>The God who governs all</i>	Ezekie	<i>The God who overrules</i>
Jeremiah	<i>The God who avenges sin</i>	Daniel	<i>The God who foreplans</i>
Hosea	<i>Love to the uttermost</i>	Nahum	<i>God is not mocked</i>
Joel	<i>Appeal before judgment</i>	Habakkuk	<i>The just live by faith</i>
Amos	<i>Oft-warned are requited</i>	Zephaniah	<i>Abused privilege avenged</i>
Obadiah	<i>The God of poetic justice</i>	Haggai	<i>Lost blessing restored</i>
Jonah	<i>God spares the repentant</i>	Zechariah	<i>New mercies promised</i>
Micah	<i>Smiting intends blessing</i>	Malachi	<i>Bring all the tithes</i>

¹ On the genuineness of the Daniel predictions see “Book of Daniel” in vol. 4 of the author’s work *Explore the Book*.

NEW TESTAMENT CYCLORAMA

A certain well-known atheist, loudly lauded because of his ability as an infidel lecturer, confided to one of his supporters: “There is one thing which secretly disturbs me; in fact it allows me no real ease of mind either day or night. If only I could know for certain that death is an eternal sleep, an utter obliteration of conscious being for ever, I could feel at ease; but the thorn that jags and tears me all the time is: *What if, after all, the Bible is true!* What that Book says about the godless man so uncannily describes me and my thoughts, that *if the Bible is true after all*, then there is a hell, and I know I am lost for ever.”

J.S.B.

“Whence but from heaven, could men unskilled in arts,
In different ages born, in different parts;
Weave such agreeing truths? Or how or why
Should all conspire to cheat us with a lie?—
Unasked their pains, unsought-for their advice,
Starving their gain, and martyrdom their price.”

Dryden.

NEW TESTAMENT CYCLORAMA

STRUCTURAL design is equally observable in the New Testament as in the Old, and, if anything, is even more captivating. It engages our attention at the outset in the four Gospels, and reappears in every subsequent part.

The Four Gospels

The four Gospels betray at once that their primary concern is *not* formal succession according to the calendar. Date of occurrence is subordinated to a scheme of *revelational* progress. In the ancient manuscripts and versions our four Gospels usually appear in their familiar order; but neither in that order nor in any other are they four parts of one consecutive narrative. Mark does not continue where Matthew ends, nor Luke where Mark abruptly breaks off. All four cover substantially the same ground. In that sense they are reiterative—though always *significantly* so. Matthew, for instance, although he observes sequence in a general way, is more concerned to present our Lord's sayings and doings in purposive *groupings* rather than by consecutive *datings*, the first group of sayings being the Sermon on the Mount, in chapters 5 to 7; and the first group of doings being the ten miracles in chapters 8 and 9. The miracle which Matthew *narrates* first is not the one which our Lord *performed* first; whereas John, who records only eight of our Lord's many miracles, *does* start with that which occurred first.

Of course, there are our incredulous moderns who will ask, "But is not the present order of the four Gospels purely accidental? Is not the idea of a predesigned over-all structure simply imaginary?" Bernard's famous Bampton Lectures answered that once for all: "When this particular arrangement of books, which may be, and often have been, otherwise arranged, is treated as involving a course of progressive teaching, it may seem that an unwarrantable stress is laid on an accidental order which some may regard as little more than a habit of the printer and the binder . . ., [but]

if the familiar order *does* exhibit a sequence of thought and a sustained advance of doctrine, then the several documents are in their right places according to the *highest kind of relation* which they can bear to each other.”

Any observant explorer of these four Gospels is bound to discover a coherent fourfold progress of (1) presentation, (2) application, (3) adaptation. Take the first of these: progress of *presentation*. All four present the same Lord Jesus Christ, yet each presents Him with a unique, aspective emphasis. Away back in the second chapter of Numbers, we are told how the twelve tribes of Israel (some two million people!) were mobilised in quadrangular formation (some twelve square miles!) around the tabernacle. On the east: Judah, Issachar, Zebulun. On the west: Ephraim, Benjamin, Manasseh. On the south: Reuben, Gad, Simeon. On the north: Dan, Asher, Naphtali. The eastern trio went under the standard of Judah—a lion of gold on a field of scarlet. The western trio went under the standard of Ephraim—a black ox on a field of gold. The southern trio went under the standard of Reuben—a man on a field of gold. The northern trio went under the standard of Dan—an eagle of gold on a field of blue.

Four ensigns: lion, ox, man, eagle. Why? Perhaps the first chapter of Ezekiel explains. In vision, the prophet sees four flashing seraphs, each having four faces—lion, ox, man, eagle. Of all created beings those flaming seraphs are apparently nearest the throne of God, and therefore express most exquisitely the *moral likeness of the divine nature*. There is that which corresponds to the *lion*. But there is also that which corresponds (let us marvel at it) to the *ox*—symbol of lowly service! There is that which corresponds to the face of a man—highest intelligence, reason, emotion, volition, knowledge, love, sympathy, understanding. And there is that which corresponds to the eagle—greatest of creatures in the physical heavens; solitary, transcendent, mysterious.

Now it was inevitable that when the incarnate Son of God Himself appeared on earth, those same four qualities should reappear; and they *do* reappear, successively emphasised in the four Gospels. For, as has been observed again and again, in Matthew the emphasis is on Jesus as Messiah-King (the *lion* symbol); in Mark the emphasis is on Jesus as Jehovah’s expeditious Servant (the *ox* symbol); in Luke the emphasis is on the perfect manhood of Jesus (the *man* symbol); and in John the emphasis is on the godhead of Jesus (the *eagle*, symbol).

All four aspects are needed to bring out the full truth. As Sovereign He comes to reign and rule. As Servant He comes to serve and suffer. As Son of Man He comes to share and sympathise. As Son of God He comes to reveal and redeem. Wonderful fourfold blending—*sovereignty and humility; humanity and deity!*¹

But besides this fourfold pattern of presentation, there is fourfold complementariness of *succession*. Matthew necessarily leads, for his speciality is the linking up of the Gospel with the Hebrew Scriptures, thus introducing the New Testament as the fulfilment of the Old. His distinguishing refrain is, “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken. . . .” His opening sentence at once gives the key: “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of *DAVID*, the Son of *ABRAHAM*.” Plainly, Matthew directs his narrative primarily to the *Jews*, of whom, as to the flesh, Christ came.

But if Matthew necessarily comes first, Mark surely fits next, and Luke next again. Lest Matthew’s account should seem to suggest that the Gospel is merely a development *in* and not *from* the Jewish faith, Mark and Luke follow with their memoirs in which our Lord is “disengaged from those close connections with Jewish life and thought which the first Gospel is studious to exhibit”. In Mark there is no genealogy of our Lord’s Davidic and Abrahamic descent (not to mention other such omissions): and in Luke He is presented in the widest sense as “the Son of *Man*”.

Last comes John’s memoir, with final proof that the familiar order of our four Gospels has an internal fitness and is ordered by a higher than human control. How could Matthew be anywhere but first, or John anywhere but last? Who can help noticing that the four are divided into three and one—the first three preparing us for the complete interpretation of the fourth? The first three familiarise us with the *visible* aspects of the wonderful manifestation, and educate us for the crowning presentation in John, where the *inward* mystery of it is interpreted to us. If, in the three synoptists, the presentation of the historical Christ shows three stages, from its original Jewish aspect to its most catholic Gentile adaptation, the fourth Gospel is its perfective and protective climax. That which has been rightly *inferred* from the reports of the three is now plainly *declared* in the review by the fourth: the historical Jesus is the Eternal Son. He who is Israel’s

Messiah is Himself Jehovah. He who is the world's Saviour is the world's Creator! He imparts life because He *is* the Life!

Yes, there certainly is complementariness of succession, expansion, application, in the four Gospels. It may be truly averred, without any straining of the data, that Matthew writes primarily for the *Jew*, Mark primarily for the proselyte *Roman*; Luke for the enquiring *Greek*; John for the *Church*, yea, even for the whole *race*.

Then, again, in the four Gospels there is a fascinating pattern of *adaptation*. What is the first miracle recorded by Matthew? It is the cleansing of a leper (8: 1-3). Why? Because Matthew is writing primarily for the Jew, to whom leprosy, the most dreaded and significant of all diseases, was a walking parable of sin and of divine judgment upon it. What is the first miracle recorded by Luke?—the cleansing of the leper? No; for leprosy has no such symbolism to the Greek, with whom Luke is primarily concerned. The priority preoccupation of the Greek is demonology; so Luke's first-recorded miracle is the casting out of a demon (4: 31-37).

According to Matthew our Lord says, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto *whited sepulchres*" That was language peculiarly meaningful to Jewish ears, for to stumble over a grave brought ceremonial defilement: but it had no such meaning for the Greek, so Luke reports, "Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves *which do not appear*. . . ." wording which lifts it from the merely local and Jewish.

So it is, all the way through the four Gospels; there is selective adaptation according to a consistent fourfold pattern (but for an ampler treatment of this we must refer the reader again to volume 5 in *Explore the Book*).

The respective differentials of the four Gospels reveal themselves in various ways, but all in keeping with one fourfold unity. For instance, there is no doubt about it: Matthew puts emphasis on what Jesus *said*; Mark on what Jesus *did*; Luke on what Jesus *felt*; John on who Jesus *was*.

In Matthew the characteristic refrain is, "That it might be fulfilled", or "As it was spoken" (or "written")—38 times. In Mark it is *eutheos* (translated "straightway", "immediately", "forthwith")—42 times. In Luke it is, "And it came to pass"—40 times. In John it is "Verily, verily"—24 times. All this is in keeping with an intended over-all design. In Matthew,

Jesus is the Messiah who fulfils the past. In Mark, He is the Mighty Worker who commands the present. In Luke, He is the Friend of sinners who walks within our human story. In John He is the incarnate Word whose “verily, verily” is divine finality.

In Matthew we have significant *groupings*; in Mark successive *snapshots*; in Luke a beautifully told *story*; in John a supplemental *review*. Matthew is the impressionist. Mark is the camera-man. Luke is the artist. John is the interpreter.

Matthew, the Gospel of the *King*, links Jesus back to Abraham and David. Mark, who presents Him as Jehovah’s Servant gives *no* genealogy (for who gives the pedigree of a servant?) Luke, who presents Him as the ideal Man, links Him right back to Adam, lifting His manhood beyond anything merely Israelitish. John, who emphasises His deity, links Him away back beyond all genealogy and cosmic ages, even to eternity.

Matthew, the Gospel of the King, ends with the *resurrection*, as the climactic act of regal power. Mark goes further, and ends with the *ascension*, which lifts the perfect Servant to the place of supreme control. Luke, the Gospel of the sympathetic-hearted ideal Man, ends with the promise of the soon-coming *Holy Spirit*. John, the Gospel of the divine Lord, ends with the Lord’s own promise to *return* (John 21: 22).

Pages more of these endlessly fascinating differentiae might be given, but they are not necessary to our present purpose. They are variations, but they are never at variance. They are complementary, never contradictory. They are not merely imaginary; they are really there. We readily agree that they can be overstated, for they are differences only of degree. There is no aspect peculiarly emphasised by any one of the four which is not also definitely present in all the other three. Matthew may be the most Jewish, and Luke the most Gentile; yet again and again Matthew goes out to the Gentiles, and Luke falls back upon Jewish origins. Mark stresses the “Servant” aspect, and John the divine sonship; yet quite definitely in Mark he is “the Son of God”, and just as definitely in John He is the Servant. Yes, the differences may be *overstated*, yet they should never be *overlooked*, for they are really there; and, beyond any peradventure, if we are willing to see, they all combine in contrastive and complete reciprocity to achieve one wonderful fourfold presentation of “our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ”. Truly enough, the four Gospels are four in one, and one in four. They are an

unmatched literary phenomenon of unpremeditated yet exquisitely balanced divergence and convergence. Perhaps it will be useful now to collocate the distinguishing features in an analytic frame.

ASPECTIVE EMPHASES OF THE FOUR GOSPELS

MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
King	Servant	Man	God
Lion symbol	Ox symbol	Man symbol	Eagle symbol
Israel's	Jehovah's	Friend of	Incarnate
Messiah	Servant	sinner	Word
Son of David	Son of toil	Son of Mary	Son of God
Primarily for	Primarily for	Primarily for	Primarily for
Jew	Roman	Greek	Church
What Jesus	What Jesus	What Jesus	Who Jesus was
taught	wrought	felt	Link back to
Link back to	Link only with	Link back to	eternity
Abraham	John	Adam	Refrain:
Refrain:	Refrain:	Refrain: "It	"Verily,
"fulfilled"	"straightway"	came to pass"	verily"
First miracle:	First miracle:	First miracle:	First miracle:
cleansed	demon	demon	water to wine
Ends with the	expelled	expelled	Ends with
resurrection.	Ends with the	Ends with	promise of
	ascension.	promise of the	Lord's return.
		Spirit.	

As we have mentioned, Matthew, Mark and Luke cover much the same ground, whereas the record of John, besides having been written much later than the others, deals largely with matter unrecorded by them. It is separated both in time and character from the others. The contrastive relationship between the three and the one may be cameoed as follows.

SYNOPTISTS VERSUS JOHN

<i>Synoptists</i>	<i>John</i>
The <i>outer</i> facts of the Lord's life.	The <i>inner</i> facts of the Lord's life.
The <i>human</i> aspects of the Lord's life.	The <i>Divine</i> aspects of the Lord's life.
The <i>public</i> discourses (largely).	The <i>private</i> discourses (largely).
The <i>Galilean</i> ministry (mainly).	The <i>Judean</i> ministry (mainly).

Acts of the Apostles

Both doctrinally and dispensationally, the narrative which we call the Acts of the Apostles is the true transition from the message of the *Kingdom* in the four Gospels to the mystery of the *Church* in the Pauline epistles. It belongs nowhere else; but it belongs *indispensably* just where it is.

The very mention of a “*dispensational*” transition may cause my amillennial or antidispensational friends to feel sorry for me, that I have not yet had my eyes opened to the newer and freer non-dispensational view of Scripture truth. With respectful frankness, may I say that the more I test amillennialism by the written Word, the more convinced I am that it is wrong. I sympathise with my amillennialist brethren in their revolt against latter-day hyper-dispensationalism, but I am persuaded, nonetheless, that they are repeating a blunder which has harassed historical Christian theology right from sub-apostolic days until this present hour, namely, the answering of *one* extreme by swinging to an equally regrettable *opposite* extreme.

We shall return to this later. For the moment I do no more than maintain this, that whatever other meanings the Acts of the Apostles may or may not have to a candid reader, the first meaning is surely a *renewed offer of the kingdom to Israel*. In this there is an observable correspondence between this fifth book of the *New Testament* and Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the *Old Testament*.

Both Acts and Deuteronomy are books of vivid *transition*. Deuteronomy marked the transition to a new *generation*; for with the exception of Caleb and Joshua and Moses himself, the old generation which had come up from Egypt had passed away, and a new generation had grown

up. Deuteronomy also marked the transition to a new *possession*. Wilderness pilgrimage was to give place to the national occupancy of Canaan. Again, Deuteronomy marked the transition to a new *experience*, to a new life—houses instead of tents, settled habitation instead of wandering, the milk and honey and corn and wine of Canaan instead of the wilderness diet. Fourth, Deuteronomy marked the transition to a new *revelation of God*. From Genesis to Numbers the *love* of God is never spoken of; but in Deuteronomy we find the wonderful words: “The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you because ye were more in number than any people, for ye were the fewest of all people; but because the Lord *loved* you” (7: 7-8). See also 4: 37; 10: 15; 23: 5.

So it is with the Acts of the Apostles. Like Deuteronomy, it marks a great *transition*, that is, from the *Kingdom* message of the Gospels to the *Ecclesia* doctrine of the Epistles. Like Deuteronomy, it marks the transition to a new generation—a regeneration in Christ. Like Deuteronomy, it marks the transition to a new *possession*—to a new Canaan of “all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies, in Christ”. Like Deuteronomy, it marks the transition to a new *experience*—to a new birth, a new life, a new dynamic in the Holy Spirit. Like Deuteronomy, it marks the transition to a new *revelation of God*—even of “the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God”, namely, the *Church*, so that now “there might be made known by the *Church* the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph. 3: 10).

But what is equally striking is that both Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the one historical group, and Acts, the fifth book of the other historical group, are books in which God gives His people a *second chance*. What is Deuteronomy? It is *deuteros* (=“second”) and *nomos* (=“law”), i.e., the second giving of the Law. Before the new generation is committed to Joshua’s charge the Law is rehearsed to them; and through them Israel is given a second chance to possess Canaan. What is the book of the Acts? Before all else, it is the second offer of the Kingdom of Heaven to the Jews—first at the capital, to the Jews of the homeland (1-12) and then throughout the empire, to the Jews of the dispersion. The Lord Jesus had proclaimed the at-hand-ness of the long-promised kingdom, and had offered Himself as Messiah-King, exhibiting His Messianic credentials in the “sign” miracles which He performed: but the nation as a whole had rejected the message and had crucified the Messiah. Now, however, in the Acts, the

message is brought again to the nation. There is a second chance given (about which we shall have more to say later), with the further new message of individual salvation through the atoning death of the crucified and now exalted Christ! Thus the Acts is the complement of the Gospels, the introduction to the Epistles, and the record which marks the historical and doctrinal transition between them.

The *doctrinal* progress in the Acts is remarkable. Was there ever a more wonderful unfolding of events and truths going hand in hand? We start with the renewed offer of the “kingdom” to the *Jews*, and end with “churches” planted throughout the lands of the *Gentiles*; while from beginning to end, under the control of the now-invisible Lord, the evolution of outward *events* is made to register the corresponding evolution of evangelical *doctrine*.

The Acts must immediately *follow* the four Gospels, for we now need to see the completed external facts of our Lord’s life, death, resurrection and ascension in their *first* meaning for the *Jews*. Equally must the Acts *precede* the Christian Church Epistles, for we are thereby prepared to see the Christ-facts in their *fuller* meaning for the *Church*.

As the story opens, Jesus crucified, risen, ascended, is Israel’s *Messiah*; but more and more as the story unfolds He is the world’s *Saviour*. All over the earlier pages we find “To the Jew first”; but more and more legibly, as the later pages are turned, we find “and also to the Gentile”.

So abruptly does the Acts end that it seems like an incomplete or truncated record. Perhaps indeed it is, from a literary or historical viewpoint. Maybe Luke, the narrator, intended to take up his pen again a bit later and carry the story to a more formal *terminus ad quem*. We cannot know for certain; yet the very abruption seems significant of a higher control, for it marks more strikingly a *dispensational* turning-point. Twice, now, the long-promised kingdom has been offered to the Jews; first, through the lips of the incarnate Messiah Himself; second, through the miracle-attested witness of the Apostles. In Acts 1 to 12 the Jews of the homeland have said their further, final “No”, in the martyring of Stephen, and in official persecution by the sword. In chapters 13 to 28 the Jews of the dispersion have given their vehement refusal, in the attempted lynching of Paul at Jerusalem, and in further disbelief at Rome. With the martyrdom of the Apostles sealing the further Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah-King,

the suspense-period of the Acts closes in the withdrawal of the offered kingdom and the emergence of the “mystery”, even the Church.

Yes, for although the twice-rejected kingdom is now being withdrawn with the close of the Acts, there are *groups* of men and women, both Jews and Gentiles, in Palestine and throughout the Roman world, who *have* believed on Him, and *do* own Him as King. What of *them*? They now become the crux of the story; for through them the very failure of Israel is being divinely overruled in the formation of the *CHURCH*, of which those many scattered groups are the first units! Thus it is, that the narrative of the Acts is cut off as abruptly as the martyred Apostles themselves, and we find ourselves at the Christian Church Epistles.

The Christian Church Epistles

If the four Gospels and the Acts are the Pentateuch of the New Testament, the nine Christian Church Epistles (Romans to 2 Thessalonians) are the articles of *possession*, in which we “go up and possess the land”; a new Canaan of “all *spiritual* blessings in the heavenlies, in Christ” (Eph. 1:3).

These nine endlessly prolific Pauline letters, as we all know, open up the most glorious truths, secrets, privileges and provisions to the beneficiaries of the New Covenant; but far more than most readers realise, they also conform to a most significant architectural design.

It is a noteworthy circumstance that in all the ancient manuscripts and versions where these nine Christian Church Epistles occur, their order of succession is the same. So far as I know, it never once varies. That is the more noticeable because the other writings of the New Testament *do* vary in their arrangement. It is further remarkable because 1 & 2 Thessalonians, which were written *first* of the nine, are put *last*; while Romans, which was written well toward the end, stands *first*! It would seem as though the Holy Spirit was as concerned about the *succession* of these nine precious letters as about the original inditing of them.

They are not just nine unrelated entities, strung together without reference to order. The very opposite! They are nine *units*, each in its fixed allotment, and all fitting together into one progressive ninefold *unity*.

But not only are they a plurality in unity, they segment themselves into a significant *triformation*. That is, the first four belong together; the middle three equally clearly belong together; the final two inseparably cling together. Or, to express it in terms of musical euphony, they classify themselves into a quartette, a trio, and a duet.

See how decidedly this is so. Take the first four (Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians). They are well called the “evangelical” epistles by way of distinctive caption because, all the way through, their emphasis is on *Christ and the Cross*. The key to Romans is right on the threshold, in chapter 1: 16, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.” Similarly with the two Corinthian letters: “I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” And as for that intense polemic which we call the Epistle to the Galatians, from its first paragraph to its final adscript, written in Paul’s own hand, its passionate logic is a defence of salvation as being solely and wholly by the Cross. There must be no admixture of Moses with Jesus; of works with grace; of the flesh with the Spirit. Nay, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . .” Yes, in the first four of the Church Epistles the emphasis is on *Christ and the Cross*.

As soon as we read on into Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, however, we become aware of a difference; not a difference in basic truth, but a shift of emphasis. Christ is still central; the Cross is still focal; but now the emphasis is *Christ and the Church*. It is here that we learn, in eloquent metaphors, of the Church mystical. Christ is the head, and His people are the body—so it is a *living* union. Christ is the bridegroom, and His people are the bride—so it is a *loving* union. Christ is the foundation, and His people are the building—so it is a *lasting* union. These three epistles have appropriately been called the “mystical” epistles.

Finally, as we travel on through 1 and 2 Thessalonians, we sense another change. Christ, the Cross, the Church, are still the big subject; but now the emphasis shifts to *Christ and the Coming*: “The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. . . .” These two vivacious little letters vibrate from beginning to end with age-end

reverberations, with the clarion blast of the Lord's sudden return; and they are rightly called the "eschatological" epistles.

Yes, these nine Christian Church Epistles undoubtedly pattern themselves into these three respective emphases—

The first four: (Romans-Galatians)	Evangelical	CHRIST AND THE CROSS
The middle three: (Ephesians-Colossians)	Mystical	CHRIST AND THE CHURCH
The final two: (1 & 2 Thessalonians)	Eschatological	CHRIST AND THE COMING

Purposeful Sequence

These nine "Church" letters, in their triune progress, set the order in which the Holy Spirit would have us learn and teach them. First, in the Romans group, we learn those great evangelical truths by which we are saved. Then, in the Ephesians group, we pass to those deeper truths concerning the "Mystery", and of our indissoluble oneness with the Son of God as elect members of His mystic body and bride. Finally, in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, our gaze is turned onward to the coming consummation of rapture and glory at the reappearing of our Saviour. Thus, these three groups of the "Church" epistles are a trinity in unity. Having regard to their respective emphases, we may say that in the first group, *faith* looks back to the Cross and is *strengthened*. Then, in the second group, *love* looks up to the Bridegroom and is *deepened*. Finally, in the two Thessalonian epistles, *hope* looks on to the Coming and is *brightened*. In the words of 1 Corinthians 13: 13: "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love."

Successive Augmentation

Besides this tripartition of the nine, each individual epistle affixes its own unique impress on the total message of the group. In Romans the key word is "*righteousness*"; in First Corinthians it is "*wisdom*"; in Second Corinthians it is "*comfort*"; in Galatians it is "*liberty*"; in Ephesians it is

“*blessed*”; in Philippians it is “*gain*”; in Colossians it is “*filled*”; in First Thessalonians it is “*coming*”; in Second Thessalonians it is “*working*”.

Like rungs in a ladder, or links in a chain, they follow one another, until successive augmentation becomes a clearly defined completion with the ninth. See how markedly so this is in their respective accents on the *Gospel*.

Romans	The Gospel and its message
1 Corinthians	The Gospel and its ministry
2 Corinthians	The Gospel and its ministers
Galatians	The Gospel and its mutilators
Ephesians	The Gospel and the heavenlies
Philippians	The Gospel and the earthlies
Colossians	The Gospel and the philosophies
1 Thessalonians	The Gospel and the Church’s hope
2 Thessalonians	The Gospel and the Antichrist

Nor can any observant reader miss seeing that each of the nine turns upon us its own eradiating facet of the believer’s union with Christ, until we catch the flash of coming rapture in the Thessalonian climax.

Romans	In Christ—justification
1 Corinthians	In Christ—sanctification
2 Corinthians	In Christ—consolation
Galatians	In Christ—liberation
Ephesians	In Christ—exaltation
Philippians	In Christ—exultation
Colossians	In Christ—repletion
1 Thessalonians	In Christ—translation
2 Thessalonians	In Christ—compensation

Pastoral Quaternion

Next after the nine Church Epistles come the four *Pastoral* Epistles: First Timothy, Second Timothy, Titus, Philemon; so named and grouped because they are addressed, not to local groups or “churches”, but to Christian *pastors*. It is quite clear that Timothy and Titus were settled pastors, at least for a considerable interval; and the wealthy Philemon seems to have pastored a “church” in his own house (Phm. 2) which, presumably, was a spacious and convenient rendezvous.

Obviously, they “fit” just where they now appear, i.e., between the nine “Christian Church Epistles” and the nine “Hebrew Christian Epistles”. They *must* be attached after the Church epistles for they now form an *adjunct* thereto. The preceding nine concern the organised church from a congregational point of view. These further four envisage it from a *pastoral* angle. They are rich in instruction for *all* believers; but their message in a priority sense concerns those who have the oversight of local Christian fellowships.

If there is one part of Holy Writ in which Christian believers should soak their minds and hearts, it is that part which is written exclusively *to* them and *about* them, namely the “Christian Church Epistles”. Similarly, if there is one part to which Christian ministers should revert again and again, it is these four “Pastoral Epistles”. Good would it have been if the Christian ministry had never gotten away from the simplicities of these pastoral charges. From how much gaudy sacerdotalism and deceptively complicated ecclesiasticism would it have saved the Cause of Christ on earth! The Scofield introduction to First Timothy pertinently comments: “Well had it been with the churches if they had neither added to nor taken from the divine order.”

But besides their inherent attachment to the foregoing “Christian Church Epistles”, they make a kind of arch-over to the Hebrew Christian Epistles. Those two ninefold groups noticeably differ from each other in their presenting and applying of the revelational data. The intervening four pastorals effect a meaningful transition from the *ecclesia* doctrine of the Pauline nonagon to the new aspects and disclosures of the final group.

First Timothy is a *charge* to “guard the deposit” (1: 11, 18. 6: 13, 20). Second Timothy is a *challenge* to fortitude and faithfulness (1: 6, 8, 13, 14. 2: 1, 3, etc.). Titus is an *urge* to “put things in order”, to “adorn the doctrine”, to “maintain good works”, etc. The note to Philemon is an *appeal*

to him, and a *model* to ourselves. In an exquisitely subtle way it accents the spiritual equality of all believers amid utmost social disparity, even that of master versus bondman. Paul's appeal to Philemon as both master and pastor, becomes significant for all time on the attitude which should be taken by Christian leaders in all such social, racial, human relationships.

These Pastoral Epistles may mark a transition in a deeper way than appears on the surface. Could it be that the Timothy and Titus letters have a latent *prophetic* bearing? Coming as they do, just at the end of the nine Christian Church Epistles, do they throw on the screen an advance picture of tragic break-away and break-down which are to characterise organised Christianity at the end of this present Church age? Think back for a moment to the opening paragraph of the first letter, where we find the primary purpose of Paul's charge to Timothy, i.e.: "That thou mightest charge *SOME* not to teach heterodox doctrine" (1: 3). Remember, too, the word in chapter 4: 1, "But the Spirit saith expressly that in later times *SOME* shall fall away from the faith". Then, with that repeated "*SOME*" in mind, recall the five sad, disturbing instances in this first epistle where it tells of apostasy:

"*SOME* have turned aside" (1: 6)

"*SOME* have made shipwreck" (1: 19)

"*SOME* are turned after Satan" (5: 15)

"*SOME* have been led astray" (6: 10)

"*SOME* have missed the mark" (6: 21 margin)

In the *second* epistle the "*SOME*" has become "*ALL*". At the beginning of it we find:

"This thou knowest, that *ALL* that are in Asia have turned away from me" (1: 15)

Then again, at the end we find:

"At my first defence, no one took my part, but *ALL* turned away from me" (4: 16)

That is why these two letters were written so urgently to Timothy. They strike a crisis-point. They are a critical challenge. The first of them marks a break-away. The second marks a break-down.

The end-times certainly were in Paul's mind as he wrote, even though he apparently had no knowledge that a long trail of twenty centuries would unwind before the Lord's return. In referring to the end-times which he thought were *then* drawing on, was not Paul so guided that his words, like prophetic arrows, find their divinely intended distant target in our twentieth century, when at long last the final days really *are* upon us? In the first letter, chapter 1: 16, he speaks of himself and his ministry as a "pattern" or "delineation" (or "intimation to posterity" as Ferrar Fenton translates it). In chapter 4: 1, he tells us what the Holy Spirit says "expressly" about the latter days; and again, in the second letter his pen returns to these "last days", speaking of them as "grievous times" (3: 1). Undoubtedly, Paul is here thinking about these age-end eventualities; but what we are suspecting is that perhaps in a way which he himself did not cognize, his two Timothy letters *as a whole* (not just their direct references to the end-days) give a *prophetic photograph* of our own twentieth-century Christendom.

Christian Hebrew Epistles

Finally, like a rearward echelon, the nine "Christian Hebrew Epistles" complete the New Testament message. As elsewhere noted, these nine (Hebrews to Revelation) differ from the *Church* series, in their evident Jewish slant and bearings. Not one of this further group is addressed to a church; nor from beginning to end of them is there any teaching about the Church either local or universal, either organised or mystical. There is nothing here about the members having died and risen with Christ, or of Jews and Gentiles being unified in one new spiritual organism. The same basic, evangelical truths reappear, but in contrastive reorientations.

Clearly, the first of them addresses the Hebrews in distinction from the Gentiles, as the opening words show (i.e. "fathers" and "us"). The Epistle of James addresses "the twelve tribes scattered abroad" (1: 1). Peter's two epistles are to "the sojourners of the Dispersion" (1 Pet. 1:1; 2 Pet. 3:1). Even those among them which are not directly addressed to Jewish readers carry incidental indications of their Jewish direction (besides "synagogue" in James 2: 2; and "Gentiles" in 1 Pet. 2: 12; 4: 3; see 3 John 7; Rev. 11: 2). The Jewish cast of Jude and Revelation are clear to all.

It has sometimes been thought that these nine Hebrew Christian Epistles mark a backward rather than a forward step in Scripture revelation, because of this Jewish flavour, and their silence on the Ecclesia as the divine “mystery”. That idea, however, is astigmatic. These nine “belong” just where they are, as a little reflection will confirm.

It was first of all necessary that the meaning of the Cross should be explicated for Jew and Gentile alike; and this we have in the first four of the nine Christian Church Epistles. Then it was time to release the hitherto hidden “mystery” of the “Church”, uniting Jew and Gentile in the one spiritual organism; and this comes in the next three of those Church Epistles. But once this “whosoever” Gospel is propagated among men in general, and the “mystery” of the Church expounded among believers, the question inevitably arises: “How does all this relate to Judaism, the religion of the Jews, the one and only authentically divine religion ever given to men, with its sanctions deep-rooted in those inspired oracles which we now call the Old Testament?”

The relation of the Gospel to Israel dispensationally is shown already in Romans 9 to 11; but what of its relation to the ordinances, the offerings, the priesthood, the temple? Is it thinkable that all those divine institutions are now discredited or otiose?

That is the big question handled by the first of these nine Christian Hebrew Epistles; and that epistle therefore “belongs” just where it appears, as the first link in this final catena of New Testament epistles.

But besides this, there are whole areas of vital truth still needing to be unfolded, and final emphases needing to be made; and it is in those senses that the later fixation of these nine Hebrew Christian Epistles is seen to be the truly logical completion of our New Testament. For instance, here there comes the wonderful new revelation of *our Lord’s heavenly priesthood and present intercessory ministry for us*—which is entirely absent from the Church epistles (unless we count the word “intercession” in Romans 8: 34 a solitary exception).

Or, again, it is in these nine that we find the fullest eschatological apocalypse of the whole Bible, unveiling to us in vivid symbol and dramatic representations the catastrophic ending of the present age; the overwhelming reappearance of Christ from outer space; the millennial dispensation; the final insurrection and abolition of evil from this earth; the

disgorging of the departed millions from Hades, for the dread judgment of the whole Adam race at the Great White Throne; the dissolution of the present earth-order, and the all-eclipsing wonder of “a new heaven and a new earth” in which Christ is the Lamb-King “unto the ages of the ages”. Obviously, *that* “belongs” at the *end* of the New Testament!

But again, these nine Christian Hebrew Epistles fittingly come last because they emphasize redemptive and spiritual *finalities*. However magnificent or dazzling the concepts of the “Kingdom” and the “Church” may be to these minds of ours, it still remains that the supremely decisive truths for us human beings are those which concern us as *individual souls*. The Kingdom may be inclusive, and the Church *exclusive*, but both are composed of *individuals*. Is it not significant that the last nine writings of the New Testament stress the individual again? There is a sense in which they carry us beyond the earlier epistles, to *the utmost goal of Christian experience*. What is it, beyond all else, that our creation and redemption as human beings is meant to actualise? Why did God create us? Was it just to preserve us alive? Was it merely to govern us, judge us, reward or punish us? No; mysterious though it seems, it is none the less true according to the Bible, that God created us, and afterward redeemed us, for individual *fellowship* with Himself, a pure fellowship of *perfect love*. That is what all else is meant to lead to; and that is what we have in the *First Epistle of John*.

Yes, these nine epistles stress the *finalities*. That is the reiteration of the Hebrews epistle in relation to Jesus as the final revelation of God; to the Cross as the “once for-all” (*ephapax*) sacrifice for sin; and to the heavenly priesthood of Christ as the at-last perfect way of access to the “throne of grace”. James underscores the finalising of faith in *conduct*; First Peter that of hope beyond “fiery trial”; Second Peter that of love among the virtues —“Add to your faith virtue . . . knowledge . . . temperance . . . patience . . . godliness . . . brotherly kindness . . . *LOVE*.” Then the First Epistle of John follows, exhibiting fellowship with God as the spiritual goal; and Revelation crowns the nine by depicting the final issues of the present age, of the “age to come”, and of ultimate destiny.

Again, not only do these nine Hebrew Christian Epistles *as a whole* rightly belong just where they now appear in the structure of the New

Testament, but they follow a pattern of mutual *juxtaposition* which is revealing. Scan them again in their order of occurrence and emphasis:

Hebrews	Faith
James	Works
1 Peter	Hope
2 Peter	Growth
1 John	Love
2 John	Continuing
3 John	Conserving
Jude	Contending
Revelation	Co-reigning

See how they thus complement and guard each other, preserving a right balance of truth before the reader's mind. Hebrews comes first with its emphasis on *faith*; for "without faith it is impossible to please God" (11: 6). But lest faith should be overstressed into seeming an end in itself, James immediately follows with his forcible insistence on *works*: "Faith without works is dead."

Next comes First Peter, with its accent on *hope*; on hope resilient amid present sufferings, and hope buoyantly anticipating future "glory" beyond earth's "fiery trial". Then, lest such hope should engender volatile visionaries, or unpractical, future-minded pietists, Peter's second epistle follows with its balancing emphasis on *growth*, here and now, in the difficult but challenging present.

Then come the three epistles of John, with their deep, simple, profound inculcating of *love*, as the ultimate of all the virtues, and the inner gateway to fellowship with God. Yet, even then, lest this love should ever be considered as something merely mystical, contemplative, or placidly withdrawn from the battle for truth, the little epistle of Jude comes, with its key-emphasis on earnestly *contending*. Real love must never be confused with supine toleration of error. As things are at present, "contending for the faith once-for-all delivered unto the saints" (1: 3) is a dire necessity. Mark the balance which is struck here; even love must needs contend for the

faith; but, obversely, this contending needs first and always to be enswathed in love.

Finally, when we have come through these successive balancings of faith and works (Hebrews and James), future hope and present growth (1 & 2 Peter), love and contending (John and Jude) we find the spiritual message completed by the Apocalypse, in its *rewards to the overcomer*. Seven times the refrain rings out in chapters 2 and 3: “To him that overcometh . . .” Then, in chapter 21, with the new Jerusalem at last breaking into view as the queen city of the “new heaven and new earth”, the King of Kings says, “He that overcometh shall inherit all these things. . . .” (21: 7), thus climaxing the progressive message of the nine “Christian Hebrew Epistles”, and thereby, also, completing the whole testamental revelation of the most wonderful volume ever written. Yes, indeed, if we have eyes to see, there is design, order, progress everywhere in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation.

Was it by chance? Can we believe
That all these varied pages
Just “happened” thus to interweave
Progressively through ages?
Is it mere hap, all blend to show
A foreseen destination,
And all augmentatively grow
In God-giv’n revelation?

¹ For fuller treatment of all this we refer the reader to vol. 5 of *Explore the Book*.

THE BIBLE CHRISTOCENTRIC

The Old Testament is a revelation of human need. Bending over the Pentateuch we hear the sigh for a *Priest*. . . someone who will deal with sin and bring salvation. Next, listening to the historic books, we hear the cry for a *King*, “Make us a king.” In the rest of the Old Testament literature—the poetic and prophetic, we see the quest for a *Prophet*; one who should speak the Word of God fully, finally.

That is man’s threefold need: a Priest who restores the broken harmony [between God and man]: a King who governs with an absolute authority based upon the inherent necessity of the law he institutes; a Prophet who shall say God’s word to man in fulness and finality.

G. Campbell Morgan

“We have found *HIM* of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets, did write: Jesus of Nazareth. . . .”

John 1: 45.

THE BIBLE CHRISTOCENTRIC

WHATEVER else may or may not characterise the Bible, it is *Christocentric*. This is not fancy, but fact. Eliminate Christ from Old Testament type-teaching, psalmody, prophecy, and the whole anticipative structure disintegrates into incohesive fragments.

Apart from Him, the Old Testament remains an enigmatical complexity of *unexplained ceremonies* (in the sacrificial ritual of Israel's religion); of *unachieved purposes* (envisaged in the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants); of *unappeased longings* (as expressed representatively in Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes); and of *unfulfilled prophecies* (communicated by Israel's inspired prophet-messengers from Jehovah).

Apart from Him the Old Testament is a river which loses itself in the sands. It is revelation without destination; something previsualised but never post-realised; promise without fulfilment; preparation without consummation.

He is the centripetal and centrifugal point on which everything in the Old Testament *converges*, and from which everything in the New Testament *emerges*. The Jesus of the Gospels is the fulfilment of Old Testament ceremony, history, philosophy, prophecy. In the Old Testament He is *coming*, as the Desire of Ages. In the Gospels He has *come* in visible humanity. In the Epistles He has come *in* by the invisible Holy Spirit. In the Apocalypse He comes *back* in the glory of world empire.

Old Testament Christocentric

Our Lord Himself taught, in categorical terms, that He is the dominating theme of the entire Old Testament. To the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem He said, "Ye search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and these are they which bear witness concerning Me" (John 5: 39). For over two hundred years before our Lord was born at Bethlehem, the canon of the Jewish Scriptures had been completed, and had become familiar throughout

Jewry in its characteristic threefold arrangement—the *Torah* (i.e., the “Law”), the *Nebhiim* (i.e., the “Prophets”), the *Kethubim* (i.e., the “Writings”). In one sweeping review Jesus says, “*These* [all of them] are they which testify of *ME*.” Moreover, He winds up His address on that same occasion by the rebuke, “If ye believed Moses ye would have believed Me, for he [Moses; 1500 years earlier] wrote of *ME*.” (Incidentally, it is noteworthy that “Moses wrote. . . .” The critical idea that Moses could not possibly have written the Pentateuch inasmuch as writing was not known to a “primitive Sinaitic clan” like Israel, has now slunk away in dumb confusion before the archaeologist’s spade!)

In Luke 24, we have the immortal episode of the Emmaus Walk. With artistic simplicity it tells of those two crestfallen disciples who were making their way down from the tragic scenes of the capital to their own quiet village of Emmaus, and how “Jesus Himself drew near, and went with them”, though unrecognised by them at first. Luke tells us that, “beginning from *Moses*, and [going on] from *all* the prophets, He elucidated to them in *all* the Scriptures, the things concerning *HIMSELF*”!

And at the end of that same chapter, we find our risen Lord saying to the Eleven, “These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you; that all things must be fulfilled which have been written in the law of *Moses*, and in the *Prophets*, and in the *Psalms*¹ concerning *ME*” (24: 44).

New Testament Christocentric

Yes, with weighty reiteration, our Lord averred that He was the all-dominating theme of the entire Old Testament; and with the same deliberateness He intimated that He would be the principal subject of the *New Testament*, before ever the first lines of our New Testament were written.

As we have already noted (see pages 52, 66), when Jesus began to apprise the Twelve that He was now about to leave them (John 13 to 16), and as He foretold the coming of the Holy Spirit, He made three pre-announcements which anticipatively covered all the successive areas of the New Testament.

First, in chapter 14: 26, Jesus says: “He (the Holy Spirit) shall . . . bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” That pre-envisages the *Gospels*, in which the Holy Spirit has indeed brought back inerrantly to remembrance just those sayings and doings of Jesus which He designed should be permanently recorded for our salvation and spiritual profit.

Next, in chapter 16: 13, Jesus says, “Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of truth is Come, He shall guide you into all the truth. . . .” That covers the *epistolary* area of our New Testament, in which the foundation truths and distinctive ramifications of our Christian faith are elucidated and given written fixity for the Church throughout the present dispensation.

Once again, in chapter 16: 13, our Lord adds, “And He shall show you things to come”, which carries our minds on to the *last* book of our New Testament, the *Apocalypse*, in which the Holy Spirit has drawn aside, somewhat, the veil of futurity, disclosing the catastrophic end-crisis of the present age; the spectacular reappearance of Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords in global empire; the internment of Satan-Apolyon in the abyss of Hades; the millennial earth-reign of Christ and His glorified saints; the final insurrection and final abolition of sin from the earth; the general judgment of the whole Adam race at the Great White Throne; the dissolution of the present terrestrial order; the bringing in of a “new heaven and a new earth”, in which Christ is King “unto the ages of the ages”.

Then, as if to summarise and focalise and crystalise it once for all, in chapter 16: 14, our Lord says of the coming Spirit,

“HE SHALL GLORIFY *ME*”

Old and New Unite

Yes, “He shall glorify Me.” That is what the Holy Spirit has done throughout both Old and New Testaments. It is Jesus first, and Jesus last, and Jesus all the way through. In the Old Testament we have the Christ of *prophecy*, in the Gospels we have the Christ of *history*, in the Acts and Epistles the Christ of *experience*; and in the Apocalypse the Christ of coming *glory*.

The Old Testament cries, “Behold, He *comes!*” The Gospels emphasise, “Behold, He *dies!*” But the Acts follows on with, “Behold He *lives!*” The Epistles join in with, “Behold, He *saves!*” And the Apocalypse finalises with the Hallelujah Chorus, “Behold, He *reigns!*”

In the Old Testament there is *preparation*; in the Gospels *manifestation*; in the Acts *dissemination*; in the Epistles *realisation*; and in the Apocalypse *consummation*; but it is the same Lord Jesus Christ all the way through.

During the times of the Israel theocracy and monarchy, there were three classes of officials who received special anointing into office: i.e., the prophet, the priest, the king. From the days of the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7) onwards, Hebrew prophecy becomes more and more figured by what is known as the “*Messianic hope*”, from the Hebrew word, *mashiyach*, which means “anointed”. Amid accumulating predictions with diverse details, this all-transcending prospect takes shape and towers up and flashes with a far-off glory: Someone is coming into human history who in the supreme sense is Jehovah’s Anointed One. An exegetical complexity presented itself to Jewish scholars, however, inasmuch as it seemed from a comparison of various forecasts that the Coming One was somehow to be Jehovah’s anointed Prophet and Priest and King, all in one. Long after the last of the Old Testament prophets had retired behind the misty curtains of the past, the seeming enigma was still baffling Jewish exegetes; and by the time our Lord grew up in little Nazareth there was a teaching that perhaps there must be more than one Messiah, or Anointed One. Yet as soon as we traverse the pages of our New Testament, we find the apparent riddle resolved with the most artless ease, and completely answered in the one Lord Jesus Christ. For in the Gospels Jesus is the anointed Prophet, preaching *to* the people. In the Acts and Epistles He is the ascended Priest, interceding *for* the people. And in the Apocalypse He is the returned King, reigning *over* the people. Yes, Prophet, Priest, King, but the one Lord Jesus Christ, the complete and glorious fulfilment!

The Messianic Hope

We must not give the impression, however, that the Messianic hope appears *only* from royal David onwards. Certainly, the Davidic covenant introduces a new *phase*, but the Messianic hope itself is found right through

from Genesis to Malachi, and then links on, through the four hundred years hiatus of the inter-Testament period, to the sudden appearance of John the Baptist. Indeed, there is scarcely a more engaging or illuminating study than to trace the unfolding of the Messianic idea right through the thirty-nine oracles of the Old Covenant. It moves forward in six stretches or stages.

First, there is the Sethite or *racial* period, from Adam to Noah. In Genesis 3: 15 the first promise is given, that the “seed of the woman” should crush the serpent; by which is implied that the Restorer should come from within the race itself. Thereafter, through the antediluvian centuries, the promise links down through a chain of chosen individuals, from Seth to Noah.

Second, there is the Shemitic or *ethnic* period, from Noah to Abraham. The great racial divisions of humanity branch down from Noah’s three sons. The Shemite division is chosen; then, within that, the line of Arphaxad down to Abraham.

Third, there is the patriarchal or *tribal* period, from Abraham to Moses. Abram is separated as the first father of a promised seed from which Christ should come; then Isaac, to whom the covenant is renewed; then Jacob, whose twelve sons become the patriarchs, or fathers, of the Israel tribes; and the promise of Shiloh is narrowed to the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49: 10).

Fourth, there is the national or *theocratic* period, from Moses to David. At Sinai the twelve tribes are welded into one nation. They are given laws, statutes, ordinances, directly from God, and are thereby constituted a theocracy. This is because the Messianic idea is now to be unfolded institutionally or typologically through the divinely designed system of Israel’s priesthood and sacrifices.

Fifth, there is the royal or *family* period, from David to the Exile. David is told that the Messiah shall come of his own house or family (2 Sam. 7). Thus the stream narrows down from the race as a whole, to one ethnic division, then to the Hebrew tribes, then to the Israel theocracy, and now to the Davidic household; and the promise is handed down, king after king, until the catastrophe of the Exile cuts off the historic Davidic throne and disperses the people through Babylonia.

Sixth, there is the final or *post-exilic* period, from the Exile to Christ Himself. What changes during Israel’s 850 years’ occupancy of Canaan—first, direct theocracy; then transition to monarchy; then disruption into two

kingdoms! At length, after deplorable apostasy, there is expulsion from the land. But during the Exile the Messianic voice speaks on through Ezekiel and Daniel; and after the return of the Remnant it continues through Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, until it lapses into a silence of four hundred years, suddenly broken by John the Baptist who announces the Messiah as actually “at hand”.

It is wonderful to see how, as the stream narrows down from race to family, in another sense it grows wider and wider, until Messianic predictions reach flood-point. Psalms and Prophets foretell His birth of a virgin in Bethlehem; His character and ministry; His betrayal and crucifixion; His very words on the Cross; His ultimate kingdom; and a variety of other features. It is heart-stirring to see, in this evolution of Messianic prophecy, the purposes of God marching down the centuries with irresistible tread. God is in control. The first coming of Jesus as world-Saviour guarantees His second coming as world-Sovereign. And the golden daybreak must surely be upon us ere long.

Old Testament Types

Nothing in the Old Testament literature is more wonderful than its latent *typical* content. To deny its presence there is to repudiate the clear sanction of the New Testament. Romans 5: 14 expressly declares that Adam was a type (*tupos*) of Christ. First Corinthians 10: 4, looking back to the smitten rock in Exodus 17, says, “That Rock was Christ.” Verses 6 and 11 of that same Corinthian passage declare the *general presence* of abeyant prefigurations all through the Israelite Exodus and Wilderness episodes: “All these things happened unto them as types [*tupoi*].”

This inhering type-content makes the Old Testament endlessly fascinating, and is proof demonstrable of divine inspiration. Unless we are warped by prejudice or intransigently rationalistic, we cannot but confess, in the words of Pharaoh’s magicians, “This is the finger of God!” All genuine prediction of future events is exclusively divine (the more obviously so when centuries intendedly elapse between detailed prediction and exact fulfilment); for the only One who can foretell and fulfil is the One who alone foreknows and forefixes. Yet however arresting may be prediction by *word*, the most astounding is prediction by *type*. Wonderful as

it may be to foretell future developments or occurrences by direct statement, it is measurelessly more so to vivify or dramatise or pre-enact them long beforehand in typical persons, objects, incidents, acts, or institutions.

Is it not astonishing indeed to see in the moving story of Joseph a prolonged advance-dramatization of our Lord's experiences and relationships as Saviour of sinners? Joseph's life moves in three phases: first, *the beloved son*, pre-eminent in the love of the father, in filial honour, in the divine purpose, and as the father's messenger; second, *the rejected servant*, hated of his brethren, sold, suffering, dead (in intent and figure); third, *the exalted saviour*, exalted as the wisdom and power of God (Gen. 41: 38, 39), to the right hand of the throne, and among his own brethren, and to everlasting pre-eminence (49: 26). Yes, there it is, lived out before our eyes in vivid type-prophecy over seventeen hundred years B.C., silhouetted against the skyline of patriarchal history.

The whole system of anticipative types is *Christocentric*. He is the focus both revelationally and historically. There is not a single pre-picturing or fore-shadowing which does not relate to Him, either directly or contributively, as the magnetic Centre of revelation and redemption.

During our Lord's impalement on Calvary, the fifth of His seven utterances was, "I thirst." In recording it, John makes a rather startling comment: "After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, *that the Scripture might be fulfilled* saith, I thirst" (John 19: 28). Even amid that direst excruciation, His omniscient mind instantaneously comprehended all the prophetic previews of His death; and He knew that all were now fulfilled save the descriptive detail (in Psalm 22: 15) that He should thirst. Therefore, in order that the word of prophecy should be clearly countersigned by act of history, He said, "I thirst."

So, when our Lord thereupon cried, "It is finished," He evidently alluded to that long line of *prophecies on Messiah's death*. All the Old Testament prophets are finger-posts pointing to the Messiah-Redeemer. Whether it be Moses the lawgiver-prophet, or David the psalmist-prophet, or Isaiah the excelsior writing-prophet, or Jeremiah the broken-hearted prophet, or Ezekiel the visions-prophet, or any of the other prophets, all point to *HIM*. Indeed, so many and varied are the predictions all converging on the Messiah, and so exactly are they fulfilled in Jesus, that if He be not

the Messiah, then Old Testament prophecy is an inexplicable medley of non-fulfilment.

The Christocentricity of Old Testament type and prediction is made the more remarkable by the *contrastive* diversity of aspects all uniting in the one Lord Jesus. Remember, the coming One must be a second Adam; a prophet like Moses; a priest like Aaron and Melchizedek; a champion like Joshua; an offering like Isaac; a king like David; a wise counsellor like Solomon; a beloved, rejected, exalted son and world's bread-supplier like Joseph; and other typical personages, all in one! He must be the ark of the covenant; the sacrifice on the brazen altar; the mercy seat in the sanctuary; the water from the rock; the manna from the sky; the brazen serpent lifted up; the passover lamb; the scapegoat; the lion of Judah; the good shepherd; the lily of the valley; the "root out of a dry ground" yet the "fruitful branch"; without form or comeliness, yet the "altogether lovely", not to mention other type-aspects! The endless marvel is that all are perfectly fulfilled in Jesus. Take away Jesus, and Messianic prophecy becomes flat, dead, a road leading nowhere. See *Him* as the glorious *Antitype*, and it all becomes luminously alive (Luke 24: 27). Oh, what a mighty fulfilment is the Christ of Calvary! All the enigmas of prophecy are resolved at the Cross. The hieroglyphics of the types are all deciphered at the Cross. The promised fountain of salvation is unsealed at the Cross. Yes, Calvary is the tragic, triumphant, tremendous focus-point of fulfilment; and Christ Jesus Himself is the magnetic Centre of all!

Even those Genealogies!

Even the genealogies seem to link down through the successive generations in suchwise as to emphasize this Christocentricity of the Scriptures. Matthew's genealogical register gives every link from Abraham down to our Lord. He intends us to understand that it is exact; not merely a loose-linking of lineal connections with intermittent gaps, but a careful, generation-by-generation pedigree; for with a tax-clerk's characteristic attention to figures he says: "So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations" (1: 17). It will be noticed, of course,

that in Matthew's third "fourteen" there are only *thirteen*! Let us at once exonerate Matthew, and inculcate some slick manuscript copyist. Jew-Matthew would never have written in verse 11, "And Josiah begat Jeconias *and his brethren* about the time they were carried away to Babylon"; for Josiah did *not* beget Jeconiah, and Jeconiah did *not* have "brethren"! In Matthew's list (as we now have it) there is an omission of *Jehoiakim* between Josiah and Jeconiah. Indeed, some few Greek manuscripts *do* insert it, which regularises the third "fourteen" and adjusts it exactly to the Old Testament data.

When we turn to *Luke's* genealogy, we find him cleaving away back beyond Abraham, right to Adam; so that we have nineteen links more:

Noah	Adam
Shem	Seth
Arphaxad	Enos
Salah	Cainan
Eber	Mahalaleel
Peleg	Jared
Reu	Enoch
Serug	Methuselah
Nahor	Lamech
Terah	

There are Evangelicals today who, with well-meaning concern to help the Bible, would treat Luke's table from Abraham upwards as elastically stretchable to "an extra ten thousand years or so", in order to fit the Genesis genealogy (especially the ten antediluvian generations from Noah back to Adam) with the fossil "findings" of modern science.

We at once agree that genealogical computation can never be as accurate as chronological reckoning; but beyond any doubt a strict adherence to the Genesis genealogy puts the appearance of Adam at approximately six thousand years ago, which, as a suggested origin of our human species is preposterous to our geologists, biologists, and comparative anatomists, especially those of evolutionist persuasion. The fossils indicate, so it is said, that man was on this earth many thousands of years before then.

Yet even so, is it right, is it reasonable, to treat Luke's ten antediluvian generations as ten *ages*, instead of ten direct lineal links? All the way back from our Lord to David, then to Abraham, then to Noah, the links are undeniably meant to be accepted as direct and unbroken; and we may easily verify them by consulting the Old Testament records. Is it to be thought that after thus carefully reaching back to Noah, Luke changes over, without hint, into giving only periodic links, with long hiatuses, even millenniums, intervening? That is not like Luke; nor can it honestly be squared with Genesis 5, where the original genealogy signifies the *immediate* succession from father to son, in each instance, by telling us exactly how many years each father lived before begetting the son through whom the descent runs.

What, then, about those fossils? Well, whatever may be said about them, if we wrest Scripture to suit *them*, we shall do foolishly and be regretful in the end. Not *very* long ago, the Bible was supposed to teach that the earth itself was created only six thousand years ago; but today a better understanding shows us that there is no conflict between Genesis and Geology as to the vast antiquity of our planet. As for those fossils? Are they indubitably human? Who would dogmatically affirm so as a scientific "absolute"? May it not be that we are on the eve of further discovery? Could not the fossils be those from a phylum of beings who inhabited this earth ages before Adamic man but were largely similar in bodily structure? There is no necessity to hold that Adamic humanity is the first race of physical beings ever to inhabit this earth.

One vital factor to recognise is this, that the Genesis account of man's *creation* and the New Testament doctrine of man's *redemption* are bound up with each other. "By *one man* sin entered into the world, and death by sin" (Rom. 5: 12). Even so, in due time, the eternal Son of God was born into Adam's posterity, to make atonement for the race descended from that "*one man*". Any theory of our race's promiscuous evolution from the beasts is repugnantly incompatible with the New Testament, for it strikes down the very centre-truth of the Gospel, that salvation is the redemption of our race from the *fall* which it sustained in that "one man", the "*first man*, Adam" (1 Cor. 15: 45).

If, then, ours is the *Adam* race, then whatever other races may have preceded it long ago on this earth, our Adam race itself began with that "one man", Adam. That is what we *must* believe, if we read the Genesis

record in the light of New Testament comment upon it. So, when was that “first man, Adam”, upon earth? If we follow and accept the Genesis genealogy, it was some six thousand years ago. We do not here stress the approximate “six thousand”, but we do invite attention again to the winding genealogical trail from “that first man, Adam”, right down through some four millenniums to Christ.

Putting the Matthew and Luke genealogies together, we note that between Adam and Christ there are just sixty generations, our Lord making the sixty-first. Are there meanings in these genealogies which do not meet the eye? For one thing, the sixty generations seem to go in six *tens*, each tenth man being of monumental import in relation to the coming Christ. Here are the sixty in their six tens:

Adam	Shem	Isaac
Seth	Arphaxad	Jacob
Enos	Salah	Judah
Cainan	Eber	Pharez
Mahalaleel	Peleg	Hezron
Jared	Reu	Ram
Enoch	Serug	Amminadab
Methuselah	Nahor	Nahshon
Lamech	Terah	Salma
<i>NOAH</i>	<i>ABRAHAM</i>	<i>BOAZ</i>
Obed	Joatham	Abiud
Jesse	Ahaz	Eliakim
David	Hezekiah	Azor
Solomon	Manasseh	Sadoc
Rehoboam	Amon	Achim
Abijah	Josiah	Eliud
Asa	Jehoiakim	Eleazor
Jehoshaphat	Jehoiachin	Matthan
Jorum	Salathiel	Jacob
<i>UZZIAH</i>	<i>ZERUBBABEL</i>	<i>JOSEPH</i>

The first tenth man is *NOAH*, the man of the ark and the rainbow; God’s first big object-lesson of salvation and new promise. In Noah’s day Satan

had so deceived and demoralised the race that even the Messianic line seemed in peril of abruption; but God overruled the racial crisis to demonstrate the invincibility of His redeeming purpose. The very cataclysm which liquidated that “evil and adulterous” civilization salvaged “the precious from the vile”, preserving righteous Noah, in whom the Messianic hope ran, as the progenitor of a new posterity; while the ark in which Noah and his family were saved became a graphic *type* of the promised Saviour.

The next tenth man is *ABRAHAM*. With him the eternal God entered into an oath-sworn covenant which inviolably secured to him (and us) that of his seed should the promised Christ most certainly come. There were seven positives in the covenant, (1) “I will make of thee a great nation.” (2) “I will bless thee.” (3) “And make thy name great.” (4) “And thou shalt be a blessing.” (5) “I will bless them that bless thee.” (6) “And curse him that curseth thee.” (7) “*In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.*” Read this in the light of John 8: 56, where our Lord says, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; he saw it and was glad.” See also Galatians 3: 16, “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not. And to seeds, as of many; but of *one*: And to thy seed, which is *Christ*.”

The third tenth man is *BOAZ*, one of the most picturesque types of Christ as Kinsman-Redeemer anywhere in the Old Testament. Boaz married Moabitess Ruth; and through Ruth all the Gentile races now become incorporated into the Messianic line. The coming Messiah is to be not only “the glory of His people Israel,” but “a light to lighten the Gentiles.” “In Him shall the Gentiles hope” (Rom. 15: 12).

The next tenth man is *UZZIAH*, for now the Messianic descent has become the royal line of Judah. The coming Christ is to be a King. It is notable that king Uzziah reigned longer than any Davidic king before him, i.e. 52 years. Yet even Uzziah died, and the nation mourned. But it was “in the year that king Uzziah died” (as all readers of Isaiah know) that the greatest of Judah’s writing prophets “saw the Lord” (*Adonay*) i.e., the Messiah, the King who *never* dies, sitting on the throne which rules all thrones (for John 12: 41 says that it was *Christ* whom Isaiah saw). The coming Messiah was to be not only King of Judah, but King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The next tenth man is *ZERUBBABEL*, one of the most monumental Old Testament characters; the Jewish prince who headed the return of the Remnant to Judea after the Babylonian exile! Zerubbabel, also, is a type of Christ (see Haggai 2: 20–23) as the supreme Leader of Israel from present age-long exile into eventual millennial blessing.

The last tenth man is *JOSEPH*, of whom Matthew says, “Joseph, the husband of Mary of whom was born *JESUS*, who is called *CHRIST*.” Thus Joseph is the sixtieth link in the chain of six tens, and connects the centuries-long descent to Christ Himself, who is not merely a new link, but the consummation of all that precedes; the Prophet-Priest-King who has no successor, being “without beginning and end of days”.

Thus, in this long chain of sixty generations, each tenth man is typical, prophetic, anticipative. Christ fulfils all. We will not try to “read *into*” this more than is there, though of course we are pleasantly tempted to reflect that ten is the number of completeness, and six is the number of man as a sinner. Six complete cycles of ten: then comes Christ, who is the goal of all the generations and the Saviour of sinners. In Him the line *ends*. In Him it *never* ends. It perfectly conforms, that He who is God’s great *SEVEN* should immediately follow those six completed tens, bringing in the new *spiritual* generation, and the kingdom which, although at present withheld, shall crown the preceding six thousand years of human history with a seventh great thousand-year day, the Millennium of Messiah’s worldwide empire, with its exact time-cycle of ten times ten times ten years of peace and glory.

Yes, the Bible is Christocentric. We see it in Old Testament prophecy and psalmody, type and symbol, covenants and genealogies; in New Testament history and evangelism, in “kingdom of heaven” and “church of God”, in epistolary doctrine and apocalyptic unveiling.

In the Gospels He is *incarnate* on earth. In the Acts He is *ascended* to heaven. In the Epistles He is *indwelling* by the Spirit. In the Apocalypse He is *returning* in world-empire.

In the Gospels He is the central *figure*. In the Acts He is the central *message*. In the Epistles He is the central “*mystery*”. In the Apocalypse He is the central *glory* of the new heaven and new earth.

In the Gospels He is *presented*—to the Jews. In the Acts He is *proclaimed*—to the world. In the Epistles He is *interpreted*—to the Church.

In the Apocalypse He is *glorified*—throughout the universe. Yes, our Bible is Christocentric.

Of Him God's ancient penmen write,
And eager psalmists sing;
For all their hopes in Him unite
As Prophet, Priest, and King.

His words and deeds all else eclipse
Which Gospel scrolls recall,
Until, at last, the Apocalypse
Unveils Him *LORD OF ALL!*

¹ By the “Psalms”, here, is meant the whole third area of the Jewish Scriptures, i.e., the “Writings”. Because the Psalms came *first*, they were often referred to as representing the *rest*.

CRISIS-PATTERN OF THE BIBLE

Tell us, watchman, what
 of the long, dark night?
Are the longed-for signs
 of the dawn in sight?
Yes, at last it breaks,
 for the watchman cries
That the first bright gleams
 o'er the hilltops rise!

Tell us, watchman, now,
 as the hilltops glow,
What the fearsome gloom
 in the vale below?
'Tis the "Day of Wrath"
 which the nations shakes
E'er the Day of Christ
 in its fulness breaks.

Oh, the watchman's voice
 now to all is clear,
As the signs of the Day
 of the Lord appear;
And he cries to all,
 "O, prepare, be wise!"
E're the day of days
 breaks across the skies.

J.S.B.

CRISIS-PATTERN OF THE BIBLE

WE have now surveyed the structure of the Bible comprehensively, and of the two Testaments panoramically. We have reflected again, also, on the Christocentricity of the Bible, with its ever-recurring key-note, “That in all things *HE* might have the preeminence” (Col. 1: 18). In this further review we are to concentrate on the *crisis-pattern* of the Bible; for undoubtedly that is one of its most prominent and meaningful features.

So, then, we take a “bird’s-eye view” of the whole Bible, observing now, not so much its literary arrangement, as the grand sweep of its history and prophecy, right from the garden paradise, away back in Genesis, on to the queen city of the Apocalypse, the New Jerusalem which is yet to be.

Our Bible is markedly a book of *crises*. The late S. D. Gordon aptly remarked, “The Bible is a tragic book. It’s a series of stories of explosions, moral explosions, tragic, terrific. The flying fragments fling out, hitting, hurting all the race. The most outstanding single word which can be accurately used to describe this singular old book of God is the word, ‘*crisis*’.” Like a mountain chain, this succession of crises runs right through the Bible landscape.

A Chain of Super-crises

There are *eight* transcendent crises, however, in Bible history and prophecy, which tower up above all others, with Alpine pre-eminence; eight tremendous upheavals around which the entire contents of inspired Scripture are ranged, and in relation to which the Bible explains the whole mysterious drama of our race’s history. Other recorded crises, whether inside or outside the Bible, may be big enough in themselves, but in comparison with these eight supremely determinative and far-reaching crises, they are small. In saying so, we are not forgetting the stentorian conquests of the Alexanders and the Caesars, the rise and fall of spectacular empires, the founders of wide-spreading religious systems, the two world-

wars of our twentieth century, the sinister emergence of U.S.S.R., or the splitting of the atom. The eight epochal events to which we now refer, all of which are either recorded or predicted in the Bible, are in a quite incomparable way, eight *super*-crises. Unless we grasp their significance, we cannot adequately understand the message of Scripture, the meaning of history, or the rationale of divine activity among men.

Seven now Past

Seven of these super-crises are now *past*. One is yet to come, though the one which still lies in the future is really *three* in one; as the Word plainly conveys. Which are the seven already past? and what is the threefold crisis yet to be? These are the seven which are already past:

1. The Fall in Eden
2. The Noachian Flood
3. The Babel Confusion
4. The Destruction of Sodom
5. The Exodus from Egypt
6. The Dispersion of Israel
7. The Crucifixion of Christ

But wherein lies the pre-eminence of those seven? It lies in three features which *together* pertain to each of them, and to them *only*. (1) They were all racial in their reach. (2) They are the seven occasions in history when God has directly stepped in and interrupted the downgrade course of mankind. (3) They were all precipitated by human sin having reached an extreme danger-point.

Racial in Reach

First, they were all *racial* in their reach. This world-wide inclusiveness will be at once clear in the first of the seven, the “Fall” in Eden, if we accept the Bible doctrine of our race’s common origin in that “one man”, Adam. When that first human pair disobeyed God, divorcing man’s spiritual nature from its life-giving environment, they brought death, both spiritual and physical, not only upon themselves but hereditarily upon all the

humanity of which they were the progenitors. The whole race was involved in that garden tragedy.

The same is equally apparent in the Noachian Flood. I do not think that the Scripture data oblige us to believe that the Flood was *global*; but we are surely meant to understand that it was *racial*. Not only Old Testament statement, but New Testament comment settles that. Geographically, the cataclysm may have been merely local (there is decided alluvial witness to it in the strata of Armenia and adjacent terrain; though nowhere else, so far as I know); but with the exception of Noah and his family “all flesh” then perished. Yes, the Noachian Flood was racial.

The same racial involvement belongs to the Babel scattering and confusion of tongues. From that day to this, the human race has been disunited by multiplex languages, and has never again acted as a concerted whole.

Perhaps the racial outreach may not seem so definite in the case of the Sodom fire-storm. It should be remembered, however, that Sodom and Gomorrah, and those “cities of the plain”, comprised the principal post-Flood and post-Babel civilization. It was a mighty civilization, too, in its own way, and in relation to the rest of the world at that time. (It must not be thought of as just *one area* in a world as populated by teeming millions as our twentieth-century world.) When God supernaturally exterminated those two capital cities, with their satellites, and their commercially prosperous but immoral civilization, He spoke to the whole race—as we see from the many references to it, through hundreds of years afterward. God had said that He would never destroy the earth again with a flood of water. That He should now destroy, by fire from heaven, a whole organised and populous association of kingdoms was indeed a shock-warning to the whole race. Moreover, to crown its racial significance, God ordained that the site of wicked Sodom should remain like an ugly scar on the earth’s crust for ever after, as a warning to all; and there it is today—the *Dead Sea*!

As for crises 5 and 6 in our list, i.e., the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, and (hundreds of years later) the Dispersion of Israel from Canaan, their racial bearings are now well appreciated. The Exodus not only ended a bitter bondage, it ended what we may call Israel’s *tribal* period. Forty days after the Red Sea crossing, the Israel tribes were gathered at Mount Sinai, where they were welded into one nation, and constituted a *theocracy*.

Jehovah gave them a threefold Law: (1) the ten “commandments”, covering their *moral* life, (2) the “statutes”, covering their communal or *social* life, (3) the “ordinances”, covering their *religious* life. They were already a “covenant people”; but they now became an “elect *nation*”, and ideally a “kingdom of *priests*” (Exod. 19: 6) through whom Jehovah, the one, true God, should reveal Himself to *all the other nations of the earth*. An authoritative cosmogony was given them through Moses, along with a perspective synopsis of all earlier revelation, the origin of man, the antediluvian and patriarchal eras, and the covenant of Jehovah with Israel, through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Going with that, there now began a revelation of God through Israel to *all* peoples; a revelation enacted in history, and permanently fixed in supernaturally safeguarded records, i.e. the Holy Scriptures.

Israel fouled the covenant by inveterate apostasy and idolatry. At last, in 721 B.C., the demoralized ten-tribed northern kingdom was swept away into the Assyrian exile from which there has never been a return. In 587 B.C. the incorrigible Judah kingdom was disintegrated in the Babylonian exile, from which, fifty-one years later, a mere “remnant” of barely 50,000 returned as a vassal settlement to their desolated homeland. But the sovereign Jehovah, whose ultimate purpose cannot be foiled by even the worst treasons of human free-will, overruled the double frustration Exile cured the covenant people of idolatry once for all; for from then onwards they became the most devoutly monotheistic people on earth. They carried the knowledge of Jehovah throughout all lands, and disseminated everywhere the revealing “oracles” of their Holy Scriptures. Nor is the world-involving movement of Jehovah through Israel yet consummated. The covenants through Abraham, Moses, and David are yet to be crowned in the millennial world-empire of David’s Greater Son, when the divine object-lesson through the elect nation shall be completed.

“Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: When I have gathered the house of Israel from the people among whom they are scattered, and shall be sanctified in them *in the sight of the nations*, then shall they dwell in their land that I have given to My servant Jacob.”

“Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name’s sake, which ye have profaned among the nations whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the nations, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and *the nations shall know* that I am JEHOVAH, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you *before their eyes*.”

“Then the nations that are left round about you shall know that I JEHOVAH build the ruined places, and plant that which was desolate: I JEHOVAH have spoken it, and will do it” (Ezek. 28: 25; 36: 22, 23, 36).

No words of ours are needed to declare the racial reach of that seventh and most profoundly critical of all past crises, *the crucifixion of Christ*. The Scriptures themselves repeatedly underscore its cosmic circumference. “Behold, the Lamb of God which beareth away the sin of the *world*!” (John 1: 29). “God was in Christ, reconciling the *world* unto Himself” (2 Cor. 5: 19). “The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the *world*” (1 John 4: 14). The arms of that Cross embrace all peoples of all complexions.

Direct Divine Interventions

Second: those seven super-crises of the past, besides being racial in their reach, are the *seven occasions when God has directly stepped in*, and interrupted the downgrade course of mankind, checking the racial momentum, and intervening in punitive, salvage, or restrictive measures.

In pointing this out, we are not forgetting that there have been other divine intervenings, more than a few, which are recorded in the Scriptures—occasions when supernatural theophanies have been given, or supernatural communications have been made, or supernatural works wrought, all of which we comprehend under the category of “miracle”. But in those seven super-crises which we have named, there is something more than miracle in the usual sense of that term. They are of no merely local or temporary relevance; they affect the whole race, and they influence the whole after-course of human history.

Glance through the seven again. The expulsion from Eden was a direct divine intervention; so was the Noachian Flood; so was the Babel discomfiture; so was the Sodom holocaust; so was the Israelite Exodus —“with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs and wonders” (Deut. 26: 8). As for the interracial dispersal of the covenant people, it is categorically stated to have been a special divine break-in. See Jeremiah 25: 8-11, and kindred passages:

“Therefore thus saith JEHOVAH of hosts: Because ye have not heard My words, Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith JEHOVAH, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment and an hissing, and perpetual desolations. . . . And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.”

“SURELY AT THE COMMANDMENT OF JEHOVAH came this upon Judah, to remove them out of His sight” (2 Kings 24: 3).

The racial bearing of that retribution and scattering is with us to this day, in all five continents, in all our commercial centres; in all our churches, in a way which obviously is not true of other startling events such as the conquest of Canaan, or the overthrow of Nineveh, or the capture of Babylon, or the sack of Jerusalem by Titus in A.D. 70. There is a moral, a religious, a *divine* significance for humanity in those seven super-crises which the Bible stresses.

The crucifixion of our Lord was measurelessly the profoundest, the most mysterious and tremendous of them all. Not only was it a direct divine intervening; Jehovah Sabbaoth had Himself become Man, “God was manifested in flesh”; and the redeeming Cross on yonder knoll outside the city gate was the central surprise of that Incarnation; the super-deed of infinite Love; the perpetual surprise from which our minds never recover, unless they are torpid with unthinking acquiescence.

Extreme Danger-point

Third, those seven crises were all precipitated by human sin having reached *extreme danger-point*. In each case things had come to such a pass that the race itself was in grave danger, and specific divine intervention was necessitated.

Take the first of the seven. The expulsion from that pristine paradise was not solely a *penal* stroke; it was a *safety* measure. There was a “lest”. See Genesis 3: 22, again, “And now, *lest* he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and live for ever. . . .” Whatever symbolism there may or may not be in those trees, we are certainly meant to grasp the fact that immortality from that tree of life would have been a peril to man, an irremediable perpetuation of sinnership, now that he had disobeyed and fallen. Mortality was forthwith imposed as necessary to man’s reclamation and reconstruction. There was *mercy* as well as judgment in that “lest”! The eviction from the Garden was a solicitous counter-measure against irreversible deeper fall. The flaming sword of the cherubim debarred access to the tree of life *for man’s own sake*. There was an extreme danger-point. The race wrapped up in that first human pair was in dire peril. God must intervene — “*lest* . . .”

So is it with all those seven peak-crises. In Genesis 6, the words used to describe the moral squalor of the later antediluvian era suggest that the race was rotting in its own corruption. A sexual blur had reached proportions where it threatened the very line from which the promised “Seed of the woman” should come to “bruise the head” of the serpent. The Deluge was not only a fearful retribution; it was drastic *salvage*.

Although in differing detail, it is essentially the same with the Babel and Sodom crises; with the Exodus from Egypt, and the Dispersion from Canaan; and lastly, with the supreme intervention in Christ. In each, we see that sin had reached extreme danger-point, necessitating acute divine interference.

So, then, those are the seven super-crises of the past: (1) the Fall, (2) the Flood, (3) Babel, (4) Sodom, (5) the Exodus, (6) the Dispersion, (7) the incarnation and atonement of our Lord. And these are the three features which together give them their solemn preëminence: (a) they were racial in their reach; (b) they were the seven occasions when God directly

interrupted the ordinary ongoing of human history; (c) they were all precipitated by human sin having reached some extreme danger-point.

THE CRISIS TO COME

But on from the days of David, recurring through the Hebrew prophets, and reappearing periodically throughout the pages of the New Testament, we find another crisis predicted, a crisis even yet future, and surpassing all others in its dramatic suddenness and revolutionary world-effects; a crisis which will mark the catastrophic terminus of the present age, the crash of the Gentile world-system, and indeed the consummation of all history. It will display those three unique characteristics of its seven predecessors: i.e. it will be (1) world-enveloping in its magnitude; (2) the culminating interposition of God in human history; (3) the final and determinative divine action against sin on this earth, a new danger-point having been reached: “Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved” (Matt. 24, 22). This yet future and climactic crisis is *the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

A Complex Content

The second coming of Christ, however, has a multiphase content. No evangelical believer today needs to be told that the promised reappearing does not terminate human history—as often used to be supposed. It does not signal “the end of the *world*” (a misconception occasioned by faulty translation of the Greek word *aion* as “world”, instead of “age”, in passages such as Matthew 13: 39, 40; 24: 3; 28: 20, in our standard English and American Versions). The flaming terror of our Lord’s descent upon the “beast”, the “kings”, the “armies”, and the “false prophet”, at Har-Magedon (“Hill of Slaughter”) will certainly end what Paul calls “this present evil age” (Gal. 1: 4); but in ending the present age it will herald the first sunrise of the “age to come” (*aion*: Matt. 12: 32, Luke 20: 35, Eph. 1: 21, Heb. 6: 5). It is the crisis-event which introduces an unprecedented era; and the new chapters of the race’s story are to be written with a pen dipped in liquid gold.

Millennial Empire

Involved contingently in the second coming of Christ there are *three* immense developments. First of these is the predicted millennial world-empire of the Lord Jesus, with a regenerated Israel as its nucleus. Two thousand years of *Anno Domini*—"in the year of the Lord", shall be crowned by one thousand years of *Regno Domini*—"in the *REIGN* of the Lord"! The Israel theocracy shall at last be actualised, and, indeed, become integrated in a completely global *CHRISTOCRACY*. "Every eye shall see Him." "Every tongue shall confess Him." "Every knee shall bow" to Him. There shall be a racial dictatorship of absolute righteousness, administered everywhere by devoutly godly officers of the Crown of Crowns; a Christ-dispensed distribution in which "the meek shall inherit the earth". "With righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth . . . and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked" (Isa. 11: 4). When graft and fraud and crime receive such immediate death-sentence, they will at last disappear! Not that all earth's millions will suddenly and genuinely turn to loving our Lord Jesus (though millions *will*). Nay, if they do not love Him now, as "the Friend of sinners" and the gracious Saviour who bled to save them, will they love Him when He rules them "with a rod of iron"?

Great White Throne

The second vast issue from the return of Christ is the final, general judgment of the human race, at the "Great White Throne". Even the Millennium will close with a violent, Satanically incited outbreak of human anti-godism; but it will be the last. That final mutiny demonstrates alike the incurable depravity of Adamic human nature, and the inveterate treason of the archfiend. Final sentence is now executed on Lucifer, i.e. his consignment to the "lake of fire". The trumpet reverberates throughout earth and hades (Rev. 20: 13) arraigning all the millions of Adam's race before the awesome assize at the Great White Throne, for final inquest, verdict, and sentence. It will be no indiscriminate mass-consignment, but an intensely individualistic inquisition by the Lamb-Lion Saviour-Judge who is the omniscient Psychologist, infallibly wise, inflexibly righteous, inerrantly

accurate, inexorably sovereign. Cases will be tried, evidence weighed, verdicts reached, sentences passed, destinies settled. For a picture of that unimaginably vast and awesome scene, read and ponder again Revelation 20: 11–15.

New Heaven and New Earth

The third development eventuating from the return of Christ is “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21: 22). It is easy enough to use the well-known Scripture phraseology, but the stupendous prospect itself is sheerly beyond all flights of human imagination. The final, general judgment at the Great White Throne ends for ever the present earth-order. Apocalyptic picture and symbol struggle to give us some impression of the sinless raptures and superb glories of the “new heaven and new earth”, but no language or figure can more than faintly represent it. The queen city will be the sinless “New Jerusalem” which nothing shall ever defile. The Lamb is King “unto the ages of the ages”. The light of the city is the face of Jesus. The joy of the city is the presence of Jesus. The music of the city is the Name of Jesus. The harmony of the city is the praise of Jesus. The employment of the city is the service of Jesus. The theme of the city is the love of Jesus. The fulness of the city is Jesus Himself. The duration of the city is the eternity of Jesus. It is then and there that the Bible finds ultimate consummation. The roses never fade. The sun never sets. The night never comes. The winter never blights. Disease never invades. Death never divides. There is never a sad goodbye; never a promise unfulfilled; never a frustration; never a tear-drop; never an interrupted joy; and never an end!

So, then, these are the eight super-crises of the Bible; but inasmuch as the eighth is three in one, it is more accurate, perhaps, to say that Bible history and prophecy are occupied supremely with *TEN* all-eclipsing crises:

1. The Fall in Eden
2. The Noachian Flood
3. The Babel Confusion
4. The Destruction of Sodom
5. The Exodus from Egypt
6. The Dispersion of Israel
7. The Crucifixion of Christ

8. The Return and Reign of Christ
9. The Great White Throne
10. The New Heaven and Earth.

Number in Scripture

There is a consistent numerical system observed throughout the Scriptures; and the number *ten* has its own unique import which is here worthy of note. In this connection we need not hesitate to quote Dr. E. W. Bullinger. He says: "Ten is one of the perfect numbers, and signifies *the perfection of divine order*, commencing, as it does, an altogether new series of numbers. The first decade is the representative of the whole numeral system, and originates the system of calculation called 'decimals', because the whole system of numeration consists of so many *tens*, of which the first is a type of the whole. Completeness of order, marking the entire round of anything, is, therefore, the ever-present signification of the number *ten*. It implies that nothing is wanting; that the number and order are perfect; that the whole cycle is complete." This indication of completion in the number *ten* is seen in the ten Commandments; in the ten generations of the antediluvian age; in the ten plagues upon Egypt, representing the complete cycle of divine judgment; in the ten kingdoms symbolizing the world-power of the Antichrist; in the "ten toes" and "ten horns" of the Daniel prophecies; and in the "ten virgins" of Matthew 25; not to mention other occurrences.

Dr. Arthur T. Pierson says that the number ten, being the sum of one, two, three and four, is "the number of *time*", because it is the result of successive additions. The whole of time and of human history seems to be built up in successive tens and hundreds and thousands, that is, in decades and centuries and millenniums; the hundreds (centuries) and thousands (millenniums) being, of course, ten multiplied by ten, and by ten again; until, from "the evening and the morning" of "the first day", to the daybreak of the "new heaven and new earth", we have a vast heptadic cycle constituting a week of millenniums.

Putting these two ideas of *completeness* and *time* together, we see in these ten super-crises of Scripture the entire history of the human race comprehended and completed, from the beginning to the end of time as we

now understand it, and an absolutely new order of things introduced, upon a cleansed and renewed earth.

This much, at any rate, is surely true: that around these ten transcendent crises the whole of the Bible is designedly arranged; and unless we apprehend their combined significance we cannot adequately appreciate the message of Scripture, the meaning of history, or the goal of the divine purpose. “Whoso readeth, let him understand.”

INDIVIDUAL BOOK STRUCTURE

Everything in Scripture should be taken carefully in its context; for each line belongs to a verse, each verse to a paragraph, each paragraph to a section, each section to a “book”, each book to a group, each group to the whole “Word of God.” Because the Bible is a progressive *unity*, they best understand the *parts* who best grasp the *whole*. No text should be treated as a separate bit. Much harm has been done by preaching the Bible that way. Bishop Wilberforce once heard a discourse on three words wrongly tom from the rest of Matthew 18: 17, “HEAR THE CHURCH,” and the sermon was on the all-authority of the Church. Next day the preacher asked Wilberforce what he thought of the sermon. The bishop agreed that the matter and delivery were good, then added, “But, my friend, I should have as much right (handling texts that way) to preach on ‘*Hang* all the law and the prophets’ (Matt. 22: 40).”

Anon.

INDIVIDUAL BOOK STRUCTURE

AN English author has recently written a useful book championing the older, evangelical view of the Bible. An American professor, who fain would be counted evangelical, but edges away from being thought *too* evangelical, for intellectuality's sake, has reviewed it in a magazine. He cannot really answer the English author, but falls back on the usual cuckoo cry of the nervous: "Orthodoxy does not depend upon a certain theory of inspiration." What he *should* have acknowledged is that the very life of real Christianity is bound up with a certain *view* of the Bible. No view of the Bible is truly Christian which does not regard it as authentic in all its records, and authoritative in all its teachings. That is how our divine Lord regarded the Old Testament, as may be conclusively shown from references in the Gospels. Therefore no view of the Old Testament which contradicts *His* view can be truly Christian. Nor can it be denied that our *view* of the Bible is determined most of all by our belief as to its *inspiration*.

We readily agree that careful distinction must be made between *revelation* (i.e. that which is revealed) and *inspiration* (i.e. the means by which it is revealed); but how can we be really sure of divine *revelation* apart from divine *inspiration*? By inspiration, in the unique Biblical sense, we mean the operation of the Holy Spirit whereby He communicates truth through chosen men, controlling and enlightening, but never swamping their free mental activity, and in suchwise as to ensure inerrancy in their transmitting of it. Obviously, there may be *degrees* of revelation; but just as obviously there can be *no* degrees of *inspiration*; for a person either *is*, or is not, divinely inspired.

Our own conviction is that every one who names Jesus as "Lord", should stand just where *He* did in relation to the Old Testament, and should accept the Spirit-sealed testimony of the New Testament writers as to *their* own inspiration. Whatever may be the intellectual fashion of the hour, we ourselves still believe that the very *validity* as well as the vitality of Protestant Christianity is bound up with the inspiration of the Bible; for

undoubtedly one's view as to the *inspiration* of the Bible determines one's view as to the *authority* of the Bible.

Furthermore, our view of inspiration always conditions our presuppositions as to what we are likely to *find* in the Bible. Those with lax ideas can never expect inspiration to show itself right down to divinely guarded details; nor will they approach the individual *books* of Scripture with just the same presumptives as ourselves. For my own part, I believe that the Holy Spirit has invested each "book" of the sacred library with its own unique meaning for us. I also opine, therefore, that it is far more important to let each book tell its own secret, than to fix some cleverly alliterative "outline" on it, and call *that* "Bible study"!

Every book of the Bible is a burning bush of Horeb, from which the voice divine calls a special message to us, if we have "ears to hear". Always, therefore, in our study of the individual books, our concern should be to find "the mind of the Spirit" rather than to wrap up the contents in useful parcels. This does not mean that there is no place for skilful analysis; but it does mean that all should be subordinated to our learning the *Holy Spirit's* intentions through a book. He has His own architecture in every part of Holy Writ, but it often takes heaven-anointed eyes to perceive and appreciate it.

With such reflections in mind, we turn now to three or four books of Scripture, by way of illustration.

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Take the first book of the Old Testament. In my time I have seen some remarkable “analyses” of Genesis, most of them useful in a way, some brilliantly alliterative, others highly ingenious. Remember, however, that Genesis is a story, a record; not a doctrinal dissertation. The strategic thing, therefore, is to catch its turning-points, or its main movements. In such a record overanalysis can easily obscure, rather than clarify, the essential emphases, so that, in the words of the old adage, we “cannot see wood for trees”.

We may always suspect an “analysis” when it requires that this part or the other part of a book has to be put “in parenthesis”. For instance, I have before me now a cleverly constructed and carefully detailed analysis of Genesis, the very ingenuity of which compels admiration; but in order to fit things in with his scheme, the able writer has to explain that the account of the Flood is a long parenthesis! Now does this parenthesizing of the Flood commend itself to one’s careful judgment? Is it quite fair to the Book of Genesis? After all, the account of the Flood has more space devoted to it than any other single event in the whole book, and is surely meant to stand out with decided prominence as one of the major events in the record. Some of us need to “set a watch” against that convenient little knack of putting brackets round the parts which awkwardly lie athwart our analyses, and then saying, “This passage, dear friends, is in parenthesis”!

When we let this Book of Genesis open *itself* up to us, what is it trying to say? We read the book through once, twice, thrice; and by that time this much has become clear: the record falls into two main parts, the first part covering a great lapse of time in a few frugal pages; the second part covering far less time, but taking far more space for the telling. It is quite clear to all, that the call of Abram, at the beginning of chapter 12, marks a “new departure”. From that point onwards, the story narrows down from the race to one man and his descendants. There begins a new movement of God in human history, a movement continuing to this day, and destined yet to head up in universal climax. So, as a first observation, we note down: Genesis is in two main parts; the first part giving us the earliest history of

our race; the second part giving us the first patriarchs of the Israelite people. Thus:

Part one: Primeval history (1-11)

Part two: Patriarchal history (12-50)

What, then, about part one? Well, we read it again, and again; and the more familiar we become with it, the more certainly we see that it is all about four outstanding events—

1. The Creation
2. The Fall in Eden
3. The Noachian Flood
4. The Tower of Babel.

Equally clearly, now, we begin to see that part two (chapters 12 to 50) is all about four pivotal persons—

1. Abraham
2. Isaac
3. Jacob
4. Joseph.

This at once provokes our question: Is there some special truth or message intended for us in those four outstanding *events* of part one, and these four outstanding *persons* of part two?

We begin to examine and ponder them again more carefully. Why, of course, there is a unifying and dominating idea running through them all, and uniting the whole book in an eloquent emphasis on *the divine sovereignty*.

The Creation

See how this is stressed in the first of the four tremendous events in part one, i.e. the *creation*. All kinds of details which we should like to have known are not disclosed to us; but everything that *is* disclosed is told in suchwise as to put all the emphasis on the divine sovereignty. “In the beginning *GOD*.” “And God said.” “And God saw.” “And God called.”

“And God made.” “So God created.” “And God blessed.” “And Jehovah God formed man.” “And Jehovah God planted a garden.” “And Jehovah God commanded the man.” God is before all, and above all, and within all, and around all, and beyond all. He is absolutely *sovereign*.

The Fall

How pronouncedly the same is emphasized in the second of those four outstanding events, i.e. the *Fall*! Once again, how much more could we wish had been told us than is reported in the severely reticent narrative! But that which the sacred pen *does* relate is written so as to emphasize, all the way through, the divine *sovereignty*. It is God who creates the man. It is God who plants the garden. It is God who puts the man there. It is God who provides for all his needs. It is God who sets the point of probation. It is God who forewarns of penalty. It is God who makes inquest. It is God who passes sentence on man. It is God who imposes the curse on the tempter. Yes, the whole fateful tragedy is so written as to underline that God is *sovereign*.

The Flood

If there is one part of history more than another about which we could have wished for more information, it is the antediluvian; but the Genesis account packs seventeen-and-a-half centuries into two-and-a-half pages! There certainly is not a detail to satisfy any merely prurient curiosity. The Spirit-guided penman omits all that is not vital to his purpose. Plainly, he intends us to see the connection between the Fall and the Flood. There is dramatic development from the one to the other. In chapter 3 we have the Fall. In chapter 4 we have Cain, and the Cain line—“the sons of men”. In chapter 5 we have Seth, and the Seth line—“the sons of God”.¹ In chapter 6 the two lines cross, with ruinous results. In chapter 7 judgment falls—the Flood. Once seen, this dramatic sequence can never be forgotten. It is the first, vivid Bible lesson on the imperativeness of godly separation and no-compromise. Nor can we help seeing how, again, in this third of the four superevents of part one, the weight of emphasis is thrown upon the divine sovereignty.

The Tower of Babel

The Babel Tower crisis (which occurred probably some three hundred years after the Flood) was precipitated, as chapter 11 denotes, by a human confederacy to establish a big racial centre at Babel, with a high astral tower. Those builders were not simpletons enough to suppose they could build a tower to reach heaven. The words, “*may reach*”, in verse 4 do not come in the original. The reading should be, “*And his top with the heavens*”, i.e. with an astronomical planisphere. Babel, however, was a concerted expression of ugly humanitarianism. The story is told in bold strokes, with the emphasis, once again, on the divine sovereignty—“Jehovah came down to see . . .” “And Jehovah said . . .” “So Jehovah scattered them.” “Jehovah did there confound the language of all the earth.” “Jehovah did scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.”

Looking back, then, over those four outstanding events of part one, we see—

- Event 1 The sovereignty of God in the physical creation
- Event 2 The sovereignty of God in human probation
- Event 3 The sovereignty of God in historical retribution
- Event 4 The sovereignty of God in racial distribution.

Or, in other words, those four transcendent crises emphasize to us four great aspects of God’s sovereignty: (1) His eternal priority, (2) His moral authority, (3) His judicial severity, (4) His governmental supremacy.

The Four Pivotal Figures

In the second part of Genesis (12-50) the divine sovereignty is equally emblazoned in the four key persons—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph. Now, however, we see the divine sovereignty in *election*.

In Abraham we see divine sovereignty in election expressed through a supernatural *call*. The primogeniture is bypassed, and Abram, the youngest son of Terah, is chosen.

Next, in Isaac, we see divine sovereignty in election expressed through a supernatural *birth*. Abram, aged ninety-nine, knowing that he and Sarai were now naturally beyond having a son of their own, said to God, “Oh,

that Ishmael might live before Thee!” Ishmael, however, was bypassed. God said, “In *Isaac* shall thy seed be called.” So, when Abraham was one hundred years old, and Sarah ninety, the unspeakably precious miracle-babe, Isaac, was given to them.

Next, in Jacob, we see divine sovereignty in election shown through supernatural *care*. It is writ large through all Jacob’s devious pilgrimage. When he is a conscience-stricken fugitive from his cheated brother Esau, God graciously intercepts him at Bethel. When he serves with his guileful, capitalist uncle, Laban, God prospers him beyond all his uncle’s scheming or Jacob’s own deserving. Later, when Esau marches against him with four hundred armed men, God wrestles with Jacob and breaks his obstinate ego-complex at Peniel, and then brings Esau to him with a brotherly kiss instead of a drawn sword. So it goes on, until, as an aged grandparent, blessing the two sons of Joseph, he says, “The Angel which *redeemed me from all evil*, bless the lads.”

Finally, in Joseph, the loveliest character of the whole record, we see divine sovereignty in direction, expressed through supernatural *control*. Beloved of his father; betrayed and sold by his brethren; exalted to the right hand of the throne as the world’s bread-supplier, he shows us how all permitted happenings, even the most contrary, are divinely anticipated and overruled, so that they dovetail into the predesigned plan, and bring about the predetermined divine purpose; until at last Joseph himself can only say to his astonished and now-penitent brothers, “It was not you who sent me hither, but *GOD*” (Gen. 45: 8).

That is the second part of Genesis: divine sovereignty in election; shown through four pivotal persons—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph; and in four arresting ways—supernatural *call*; supernatural *birth*; supernatural *care*; supernatural *control*. We may therefore set out the whole book thus:

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

THE DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY—IN CREATION, HISTORY AND REDEMPTION
I. PRIMEVAL HISTORY (1-11) Four Outstanding Events

THE CREATION—Divine sovereignty in the physical creation.
God's eternal priority.

THE FALL—Divine sovereignty in human probation.
God's moral authority.

THE FLOOD—Divine sovereignty in historical retribution.
God's judicial severity.

THE BABEL CRISIS—Divine sovereignty in racial distribution.
God's governmental supremacy.

II. PATRIARCHAL HISTORY (12-50)

Four Outstanding Persons

ABRAHAM—Divine sovereignty in election.
Supernatural *call*.

ISAAC—Divine sovereignty in election.
Supernatural *birth*.

JACOB—Divine sovereignty in election.
Supernatural *care*.

JOSEPH—Divine sovereignty in direction.
Supernatural *control*.

We do not say that the foregoing is the strictly *literary* lay-out of Genesis (or we shall be told that its “sections” are denoted by the ten occurrences of the Hebrew word *toledah*, i.e. “generations”, in chapters 2: 4; 5: 1; 6: 9; 10: 1; 11: 10; 11: 27; 25: 12; 25: 19; 36: 1; 37: 2). What we *do* say is, that our analysis gives the *strategic* perspective, which is far more important inasmuch as it interprets the spiritual *message* of the book.

When we thus see the focal truth of a book, we at once begin to appreciate how designedly it harmonises with the full scheme or scope of Biblical revelation. Reflect: Genesis comes *first* in our Bible. What is the first great lesson we are intended to learn? Seeing the four transcendent turning-points of part one, and the four significant personages of part two, in sharp relief, we have quickly perceived the unifying idea of the whole. Standing as leader of the sixty-six books, Genesis would bring us to our knees in reverent obeisance before God, as it exhibits to our eyes, and thunders in our ears, the truth which is to be learned before all others in our

approach to God, in our interpretation of history, and in our study of divine revelation, namely *THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD*.

It is enriching beyond estimate to travel successively through the individual books of Scripture, patiently discerning rather than cleverly dissecting. Take the Book of Exodus. Unless we are determined on making some special set-out of our own, how clearly and illuminatively it opens up its own tripartite territory to us! In chapters 1 to 18 we have the *EXODUS*; in chapters 19 to 24 the *LAW*; in chapters 25 to 40 the *TABERNACLE*. In the first of these we see the divine *power*; in the second the divine *holiness*; in the third the divine *wisdom*.

Or look again at the Book of Joshua. Chapters 1 to 5 are all about *entering* the land; chapters 6 to 12, *overcoming* the land; chapters 13 to 24, *occupying* the land. When we read it in the light of the Ephesians epistle, we see how the whole of it is tutoring us in the exercise of *appropriating faith*.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

But now, having surveyed the first book of the *Old* Testament, let us turn for further illustration to the first book of the *New*. Matthew himself guides us as to his twofold memoir of Jesus:

“He departed *into* Galilee” (4: 12)

“He departed *from* Galilee” (19: 1)

Those two “divide” points are the first indications as to Matthew’s ground-plan. Chapters 4 to 18 are all about the *detour in Galilee*. Chapters 19 to 28 are all about the *climax in Judea*.

Look first through the chapters giving the ministry in Galilee. Whichever way *we* may prefer to plot out the data, Matthew himself gives it to us in three groups, three *tens*, which tell us first what Jesus *taught*; then what Jesus *wrought*; then what people *thought*. In other words, Matthew gives us a tenfold view of what our Lord taught, i.e. in the Sermon on the Mount (5-7). Then he gives us ten miracles which Jesus performed (8-10). Then he gives us ten reactions to our Lord’s teachings and miracles (11-18).

Here they are:

The Tenfold Message (5-7).

1. The Beatitudes (v. 3–16).
Or the subjects of the kingdom.
2. Moral Standards (v. 17–48).
Or Christ versus “It was said.”
3. Religious Motives (vi. 1–18).
Alms (1); prayer (5); fasting (16).
4. Mammon Worship (vi. 19–24).
Or earthiness versus godliness.
5. Temporal Cares (vi. 25–34).
Or anxiety versus trust in God.
6. Social Discernment (vii. 1–6).
Censuring (1); indiscretion (6).
7. Encouragements (vii. 7–11).
Prayer makes it all practicable.
8. Summary in a sentence (vii. 12).
Such a life fulfils Scriptures.
9. The Alternatives (vii. 13–14).
Two ways: broad versus narrow.
10. Final Warnings (vii. 15–27).
False prophets (15); false profession (21); false foundation (26).

In the final part, note the succession of solemn *alternatives*—the two ways, broad and narrow; the two gates, wide and strait; two destinations, life and destruction; two classes of travellers, many and few; two kinds of trees, good and corrupt; two sorts of fruit, good and bad; two builders, wise and foolish; two foundations, rock and sand; two houses; two storms; two results.

The Ten Miracles (8-10).

1. The cleansing of the leper (8: 1–4).
2. Centurion’s servant: palsy (8: 5–13).
3. Peter’s wife’s mother: fever (8: 14, 15).

4. The stilling of the storm (8: 23–27).
5. Gergesene demoniacs healed (8: 28–34).
6. The man cured of the palsy (9: 1–8).
7. The woman with haemorrhage (9: 18–22)
8. The ruler's daughter raised (9: 23–26).
9. Two blind men given sight (9: 27–31).
10. The dumb demoniac healed (9: 32–34).

The Ten Reactions (11-18).

1. John the Baptist (11: 2–15).
2. “This generation” (11: 16–19).
3. Galilean cities (11: 20–30).
4. The Pharisees (12: 2, 10, 14, 24, 38).
5. The multitudes (13: parable of soils, etc.).
6. The Nazarethites (13: 53–58).
7. Herod the king (14: 1–13).
8. Jerusalem scribes (15: 1–20).
9. Pharisees, Sadducees (16: 1–12).
10. The twelve Apostles (16: 13–20).

How revealing these ten are! If we run through them again, noting the main characteristic in each, the general result of our Lord's Galilean itinerary is laid bare.

1. John the Baptist—undecided (11: 3).
2. “This generation”—unresponsive (11: 17).
3. Galilean cities—unrepentant (11: 20).
4. The Pharisees—unreasonable (12: 10, 14, 24).
5. The multitudes—undiscerning (13: 13–15).
6. The Nazarethites—unbelieving (13: 58).
7. Herod the king—unintelligent (14: 2).
8. Jerusalem scribes—unconciliatory (15: 2, 12).
9. Pharisees, Sadducees—unrelenting (16: 1).
10. The Apostles—glad recognition (16: 16).

In these tens we see the sum of all the main factors and features. There is widespread, enthusiastic interest in the miracles, the message, the Man;

but those who respond with spiritual sincerity and intelligence are a small minority, while the Jewish leaders are fixedly hostile. As the Galilean detour nears its end, our Lord sees Israel's implicit rejection, and announces the coming new dispensational turning-point: "*I will build My CHURCH.*"

Climax in Judea.

Our comments here, on the second part of Matthew's record (19-28) need be only brief. As in part one, so in part two, he arranges his facts in three groups:

The Presentation—Jesus offered as King (19-25).

The Crucifixion—Jesus slain as Felon (26-27).

The Resurrection—Jesus risen as Saviour (28).

Each of these three movements, of course, has its vivid accompaniments. We simply observe that in those three groupings of part one, and these three groupings of part two, we have the whole story and its issues in bold relief. Remember, Matthew comes *first* in our New Testament. What are the first questions which we naturally ask about Jesus? Are they not as follows? (1) What did He teach? (2) What did He do? (3) How did people react? (4) How did it all issue? Those are just the four questions that Matthew answers, and in that normal order. Matthew ends with the mighty wonder of our Lord's resurrection. He does not discuss its theological implications (those were to be expounded later). His climax is to narrate the fact itself, and the stupendous pronouncement which now fell from the lips of the risen Saviour in virtue of it: "All authority is given unto Me, in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and disciple all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And, lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the age."

In the Old Testament we find it plainly enough predicted that the coming Christ should be the "Son of David", that He should take the throne and reign, not only over a restored Israel but over all other nations as well. It is equally foretold that He should be a Redeemer and Saviour in a substitutionary and sin-expiating sense; that He should be a Prince and a

Saviour not only to the Jews but to the Gentiles as well. But in our risen Lord's pronouncement at the end of Matthew's Gospel there is that which was *not* predicted, and which transcends all that *was* predicted; for Israel's rejected Christ, who has now become the world's Saviour, is lifted "far above all principality and power and authority, and every name that is named" (Eph. 1: 21), and crowned as the *Administrator of the whole universe!*

Seeing the Real Breaks.

So often, when we "get" a book of Scripture in this strategic way, its individual verses light up with new or accentuated pertinences. Take the First Epistle of Peter. Why insist on analysing it into seven or nine parts, and then saying, "That's the First Epistle of Peter"?—when all the time Peter himself has made it as clear as emphasis could, that his precious little treatise is in *three*! I have just looked through several "outlines" of the epistle, each quite sure it is the right one; yet not one of them acknowledges the most obvious "divide" in the epistle! Chapter 4, verse 11, reads:

"THAT GOD IN ALL THINGS MAY BE
GLORIFIED THROUGH JESUS CHRIST,
TO WHOM BE PRAISE FOR EVER AND EVER.
AMEN."

Now if that doxology and "amen" do not indicate that Peter himself thereby emphasizes a major break in his letter, I am strangely mistaken. Why not accept it as Peter's own punctuation? When we do, how simply and beautifully the epistle arranges itself! Notice how, immediately after his doxology and "amen", Peter freshly addresses his readers—"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you. . . ." Only once before this has he so addressed them, i.e. in chapter 2:11, "Dearly *beloved*, I beseech you as strangers and *pilgrims*. . ." Those two verses where he begins again with, "Beloved", demarcate the epistle into its *intended* three areas, and are confirmed by that doxology and "amen" at chapter 4: 11. Thus the epistle naturally opens up as:

1. THE LIVING HOPE—and what goes with it (1: 1–2: 10).
2. THE PILGRIM LIFE—and how to live it (2: 11–4: 11).
3. THE FIERY TRIAL—and how to bear it (4: 12–5: 14).

Note how, in part one, going with the “living *hope*” are the “living *Word*” (1: 22–2: 3) and the “living *Stone*” (2: 4–10). Note how, in part two, the pilgrim life is related to citizens (2: 12–17), servants (2: 18–25), wives, husbands (3: 1–7), outsiders (3: 8–16), suffering (3: 17–4: 6), Christian fellowship (4: 7–11). Note how, in part three the “fiery trial” is related to the second coming of Christ (4: 13, 5: 1, 4, 6, 10). Is not the coming “fiery trial” the epoch of “great tribulation” which seems predicted to occur just before our Lord’s return? If so, how a promise like that in chapter 5: 7 glistens with new relevance!—“Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.” That promise has always been precious, but it is when taken in its setting that it shines most lustrously. It is when the troubles of the “great tribulation” break loose, at the ending of this present age, that godly hearts will most fully prove the triumphant thrill of this advance reassurance —“*Cast all your care upon Him; for He careth for you*”!

Over thirty years ago now, I determined to study my way right through the Bible, resolving at the outset that instead of fitting (much less forcing) an “outline” of my own upon any book of Scripture, I would let each one speak in *its own way* to my understanding. It occupied me for years. The effect of it has never worn off, and never will. It was then that I learned how *really* each component part of Holy Writ carries its own internal evidence of methodical mind and purpose. The result of those studies became embodied in my published six-volume Bible course, EXPLORE THE BOOK, from which examples have been given in this present chapter. Some of those parts of Scripture which at first seemed least formally planned turned out, on closer study, to hold the most unmistakable lines and proofs of order or design. What is more, that same endlessly articulate Bible, in all its parts, is still waiting to yield *new* evidences and recompenses to those who still give time really and prayerfully to study it.

Oh, peerless volume, God-inbreathed,
Our charter of salvation;

Supernal treasure, God-bequeathed
To every man and nation;
Through holy men inspired of old,
The God-writ pages still unfold
Their matchless revelation.

Blest book of unsealed mysteries
And vast illumination,
Transcending men's philosophies
And changeful speculation:
The true account of earth and man,
Of sin, and of redemption's plan,
And history's consummation.

The one authentic speech of God
By inwrought inspiration;
The way of truth our fathers trod
To heavenly destination:
The mine of everlasting wealth,
The ever-flowing fount of health,
Through every generation.

¹ The strange idea, popularised again by Bullinger and Pember, that the “sons of God” in Genesis 6 were fallen angels is both exegetically and psycho-physically untenable. For a full argument against it see the author's book, *Studies in Problem Texts*.

PART TWO

MAINLY DISPENSATIONAL

PREMILLENNIAL VERSUS AMILLENNIAL

It shall greatly helpe ye to understande Scripture, if thou mark, not
only what is spoke or wrytten,
but of whom,
and to whom,
with what words,
and what time,
where,
to what intent,
with what circumstance,
considering what goeth before,
and what followeth.

Miles Coverdale.

PREMILLENNIAL VERSUS AMILLENNIAL

IT is not without wide-awake sensibilities that we head the second part of this book *MAINLY DISPENSATIONAL*. Nowadays, to a considerable number of able and earnest Evangelicals, the very word, “dispensational”, is a prickly irritant.

Over the past few decades there has developed a stiff reaction against the early Plymouth Brethren and “Scofield Bible” type of dispensationalism. It has found focus in what is now known as *Amillennialism*, which denies that there is to be an actual “Millennium” or thousand-years visible reign of Christ on this earth, as it also denies other components in the “Brethren” and “Scofield” scheme of Bible interpretation.

Perhaps some such anti-dispensational revolt was inevitable; but my own view is that Amillennialism commits the fairly common fault of countering one extreme by needlessly swinging to another which is equally unwarrantable.

No one will deny that our Bible is in two main parts—the Old Testament and the New. Nor can anyone seriously deny that those two Testaments, in certain fundamental respects, stand in marked contrast to each other. The Old distinctively features a *nation*. The New distinctively features the *Church*. The one concerns an *earthly* seed, elect in Abraham. The other concerns a *spiritual* seed, elect in Christ. The one centres in *Moses*. The other centres in *Jesus*. But, most contrastively of all, the Old unfolds a covenant of *LAW*, whereas the New unfolds a covenant of *GRACE*. Scripture itself underlines this fundamental contrast:

“For the *law* was given through Moses, but *grace* and truth came through Jesus Christ.”—John 1: 17.

Now these two covenants express two basically contrastive ways in which the all-sovereign God has dealt with responsible man. In other words, they are two contrastive *dispensations*; for the word, “dispensation”, means a dispensing or way of administering.¹

Let this, then, be here reaffirmed as being truly Scriptural: there *are* different dispensations demarcated in Holy Writ. Moreover, in their dealing with man’s relationship to God, those two “dispensations” and their two distinctive “covenants” are marked *opposites*. Under the former, personal justification comes by keeping God-given Commandments. Under the latter it comes through union with a vicarious Sin-bearer. The former is pronouncedly a scheme of salvation by *works*; the latter brings salvation by *faith*. The one is a covenant of *law*, the other is a covenant of *grace*. The old dispensation is that of “the Letter”—an *outward command*; the new dispensation is that of “the Spirit”—an *inward power*. The one was an objective ethic; the other is a transforming dynamic. The one brought condemnation and penal death. The other brings forgiveness and renewal of life. Above all else, the old covenant voices the requirements of the divine *holiness*, whereas above all else, the new covenant expresses the outreach of the divine *love*. In short, the old is a *demand*; the new is a *Gospel*.

This is made so plain in our Bible that the only way to blur it is by use of verbal ambiguity or perambulation. For instance, it is said, as though it were a fine summary of the facts, “Oh, the whole Bible is the Gospel.” But that is just not true. The Mosaic law, with its awesome warnings and penalties, whether to the nation Israel or to the individual transgressor, is *not* “glad tidings”! If it be said that the Mosaic law is studded with *types* of Christ and of the salvation which is ours in Him, the reply is that they are all types of a coming deliverance *outside* the Law and *from* the Law.

Again and again Scripture sets the two dispensations off as opposites. “Ye are not under the *law*, but under *grace*” (Rom. 6: 14). “The *law* worketh wrath . . . therefore it [justification] is of faith that it might be by *grace*” (Rom. 4: 15, 16). Let it be settled once for all in our minds: the Bible is indeed dispensational in the sense that it is self-divided into those two main dispensations—the Old and the New; notably opposite in nature, and occupying two different time-periods.

But from this we may go on, with equally sure footing, to aver that *besides* those two main dispensations there are other dispensational programmes clearly indicated in Scripture. Certain of these are notably associated with two far-reaching covenants which God made with Hebrew Abraham and royal David of Judah respectively. In the whole of human history those two covenants are the only divine treaties with men to the fulfilling of which God has bound Himself with a solemnly sworn *oath*. They are therefore to be the more seriously estimated as having profoundest significance and inexorable certainty of fulfilment.

To my own mind it is incomprehensibly strange how anyone can examine the wording of those covenants and the various Scripture comments upon them without seeing that they refer specifically and centrally to the earthly nation, *Israel*; that they are to have a concrete *national* fulfilment in and through that nation here on earth (as well as a *spiritual* fulfilment in and beyond the Israel people); and that they prospectively culminate in a wonderful reign of Israel's promised *Saviour-Messiah* in a climax-era of human history following this present age of grace.

However, there are today, even among staunch Evangelicals, a growing number who differ from us. I refer, in particular, to those who believe and teach what is known as *Amillennialism*—a resurrected form of Biblical interpretation which more or less generally *spiritualises* the Abrahamic and Davidic prophecies, and in large measure applies the Israel promises to the Christian *Church*. Going with this, Amillennialism denies that there is any distinctive further future prophesied for the *nation* Israel, as it also denies therefore that there will be a *Millennium* in the sense of an actual thousand-years reign of Christ on earth with a regenerated nation Israel as the centre of His global rule.

As there are many still hazy about the teachings of Amillennialism, it may be useful if we here clarify and answer its leading arguments. After reading through several of the most representative works published by amillennial writers, I am being faithful to the facts if I say that the following are six clear commitments of Amillennialism.

1. There is no “millennium” between the end of the present age and the final judgment of the human race.

2. In Revelation 20, which speaks about the reign of Christ with the saints on earth, the language, particularly the expression, “thousand years”, is used merely figuratively, and refers to the Gospel era.
3. The nation Israel is no longer in covenant relationship with God, and has no prophesied national future.
4. All those Old Testament promises and prophecies which pertain to the covenant *nation* have already been fulfilled.
5. All those promises and prophecies of blessing which have *not* been fulfilled in and to the Israel nation are meant to be interpreted *spiritually*, they refer to the Christian Church, the Gospel age, and a consummation in which there is no place whatever for Israel as a nation.
6. There is no “great tribulation”, in any distinctive sense, at the ending of the present age, nor is there any “secret rapture” of the Church.

So far as I know, the above six items are expressed as faithfully as any Amillennialist would wish: and, as will be at once realised, numbers 3 and 4 largely affect one’s whole idea of the Bible and its message.

Revelation 20

So far as Revelation 20 is concerned, I think our Amillennialist brethren are blameworthy in the way they misrepresent its relationship to Premillennialism. How wrong it is for an Amillennial writer of distinction to allege that the whole premillennial doctrine is “founded on one short paragraph of three verses” in a book of Scripture which is “confessedly of highly wrought symbolism and mystery”! Equally wrong is a magazine article, written by an excellent evangelical but amillennial minister, which says, “A *millennium*, or thousand-year reign of Christ, is mentioned only once in the New Testament; that is, in Revelation 20. As it is by no means easy to decide from the context whether that reign is to be on earth or in heaven, whether it is to be physically tangible or purely spiritual, one can only marvel that the whole system of interpretation known as premillennialism should be built upon it.”

The bigger “marvel” to me is that our editor friend can miss seeing that the Messianic kingdom is nothing less than a *major subject* of Old

Testament prediction. It recurs in passages equally definite and glowing throughout the pages of the Prophets, and is also a major goal of New Testament eschatology. The beginning of everything in the New Testament is the announcement of the angel to Mary:

“He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord shall give unto Him *the throne of His father David*; and He shall reign over *the house of Jacob* for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1: 32, 33).

Are the angel’s words concerning the “throne of David” and the “house of Jacob” to be *spiritualised* into a covert reference to the Church? Or are they to be ignored as meaning nothing in particular? Do our amillennial brethren have the right to deny the words their natural meaning? Beyond all controversy, there is only one way in which Mary herself could understand the words, which also was the way she was evidently *intended* to understand them. Moreover, neither our Lord nor any New Testament writer anywhere spiritualises or modifies or in any way disclaims these predictions.

Repeatedly our Lord refers to His kingdom as *yet to be*; not as a purely spiritual reign in men’s hearts, but as a visible kingdom with earthly dimensions, brought in at His return as “Son of Man”, and exercised governmentally among the “*nations*”. The same recurs throughout the Epistles, until it is finally vivified in the dramatic portrayal of the Apocalypse.

As for our editor friend’s remark that it is “by no means easy to decide from the context [i.e. Revelation 20] whether that reign is to be on earth or in heaven”, whether “physically tangible or purely spiritual”, we can only marvel the more; for in Revelation 20, just before the six references to the “thousand years” we are given these locating particulars:

1. Our Lord’s descent as King of Kings and Lord of Lords is to this *earth*, to “smite” and then “rule” the “*nations*” (19:15).
2. The armies of “kings” and “captains” and “mighty men” are overthrown on *earth*, for the “fowls” are “filled with their flesh” (19: 15, 18, 21).

3. Satan is bound a “thousand years”, that he should no more “deceive the *nations*” until the expiry of “the thousand years” (20: 3).
4. When Satan is briefly released about the *end* of the “thousand years”, he goes out again to the “four quarters of the *earth*”, once more to “deceive the *nations*” (20: 7, 8).
5. The saints who “live” and “reign” with Christ during the “thousand years” include those who were “*beheaded*” (literally!) for His sake on earth; and they now “live” again *bodily*, being participants in “the first *resurrection*” (20: 4–6).
6. When Satan goes out again at the *end* of “the thousand years”, he gathers his insurrectionists from “the breadth of the *earth*”, against “the beloved *city*”; then fire comes “*down from God out of heaven*”, and devours them (20: 7–9).

Symbols or no symbols, what more could the Scripture add to make plain that the thousand-years reign is *on earth*?

Moreover, Revelation 20, other than being the *only* reference to that thousand-years kingdom (as our editor friend avers), is the final link in a long *chain* of Scripture references. Admittedly, it is the only reference which discloses the *duration* of it, but that is a very different matter. Are there not thinkable reasons why the time-period was *not* revealed before then?—and are there not appropriate reasons why it *was* revealed right at the end? Is not the Bible revelation progressive? Does any one passage say *everything* about any one of the recurrent themes of Holy Writ?

One clear-shining guide-star is the unmistakable way in which Paul declares that the Church of this present age was a “mystery” never revealed through Old Testament prophets (Eph. 3: 5, 10 with 1 Pet. 1: 10, 11) but “kept secret”, “from generations” and “hid in God” even from “the beginning of the ages” (Col. 1: 24, 26; Eph. 3: 9; Rom. 16: 25, 26). I know only too well that our amillennial brethren endeavour to explain away the force of Paul’s words in Ephesians 3: 3–6, but even *they* find themselves bound to admit that in considerable *degree* the Church of the New Testament was concealed from Old Testament foreview. What our amillennial brethren *cannot* squarely face up to is the clear wording of Romans 16: 25, 26 and Colossians 1: 24, 26, which simply does not admit

any thought of *degree*. According to those verses, the “mystery” was a *complete* secret throughout the pre-Christian era.

Why, then, was the Church thus kept “hidden”, as Paul says, until New Testament times? Is not the answer obvious, if we distinguish (what many confuse!) divine *foreknowledge* from divine *foreordination*? God did not foredetermine Israel’s rejection and crucifixion of Christ (for God cannot be the author of evil, neither does He violate the freedom of the human will) but He *foreknew* it, and overruled it to the fulfilling of further and greater purposes. If the Jewish rejection of the offered kingdom, and the intervening of the Church, and the unfolding of the present age, had all been plainly declared in advance, our Lord’s offer of the kingdom, and Israel’s blind repudiation, as recorded in the Gospels, would all have been a theatrical artificiality. But once Israel’s rejection of the kingdom has become deep-fixed, as recognised in our Lord’s later parables, and as later exposed in the Acts of the Apostles, the further revelation comes that the Messianic kingdom is to be held in abeyance, yet shall surely come at last when the Lord Jesus returns “in power and great glory”.

Obviously, neither the present intervening age nor the eventual *duration* of that Messianic kingdom could be revealed in advance through Old Testament prophets; but its prevailing features were foretold in many a graphic pen-picture. When we read on into the New Testament, we find our Lord parabolically revealing the further truth that the kingdom is to be held over, but will certainly be brought in at last, by His own second coming. Still further, in the Epistles, that same coming kingdom is anticipated again and again as a glorious hope which now, also, the *Church* shares (1 Cor. 15: 22–25; Col. 4: 11; 1 Thess. 2: 12; 2 Thess. 1: 5; 2 Tim. 4: 1, 18; Heb. 12: 28; Jas. 2: 5; 2 Pet. 1: 11). Is there not, then, a *fittingness* that the last word of Scripture on the subject, in Revelation 20, should tell us the *time-period* of the kingdom?

Moreover, does not that thousand-year period fit well with the whole scope of Biblical revelation concerning our Adamic race? This earth of ours may be as many millions of years old as the most generous geologists aver; and it is reasonable to suppose that there may have lived on this earth, prior to our Adamic humanity, successive species of sentient beings not dissimilar structurally to us human creatures (could this have a bearing on ostensible pre-Adamic fossils?) but if the Genesis narrative is to be taken at

its face value, and if genealogical reckoning back through the patriarchs is substantially reliable, the human family which originated in *Adam* has been on this earth only some six thousand years; four thousand B.C., and two thousand A.D., and this, says the Scripture, is to be crowned by one thousand years r.d. (*Regno Domini*), “in the reign of the Lord”! This thousand-year kingdom is the “age to come” (singular) as distinct from the “ages to come” (plural) amid the new heaven and new earth (see Eph. 1: 20, 2: 7; Rev. 21: 1, 22: 5). This concept of Adamic human history as a vast heptad, or week of seven successive millennia, with the seventh as complete sabbath, is sceptically labelled by amillennialists as being “of pre-Christian origin”; but what if it is? Does not that make it the more notable? Even away back then it must have been either humanly inferred or divinely revealed. Certainly we who are living now, toward the end of the sixth millennium, can see all around us probabilities adding up to certainty that it will end in the biggest crisis-climax of our race’s history, and must be followed by a very different state of things internationally.

We make all such remarks as the foregoing somewhat tentatively, leaving ourselves open for further enlightenment; but there is nothing tentative about our next remark. It is sheer exegetical injustice to allege that the whole “premillennial system” is based upon one short passage of the Apocalypse, just because that one passage is the only one which gives the actual *duration* of the promised kingdom, i.e. “one thousand years”. One might just as truly say that our whole doctrine of the resurrection of the saints is built upon one passage in First Corinthians because that is the only passage which describes the kind of *bodies* we shall then have. The allegation that premillennialism is founded on one passage is a blank cartridge which makes a bang but shoots nothing. It is a companion scarecrow to that other equally perverted amillennial criticism, that we premillennialists teach a millennial kingdom “merely *Jewish* and *Palestinian*.” Premillennialists, believing in a real, outward, visible, global, millennial kingdom of Christ on this earth, still future, and to be brought in by His second coming, may well claim that their premillennial view is “harmonious, selfconsistent, and, above all, based upon the infallible authority of the Scriptures.”

Has national Israel no prophesied future?

Amillennialists persist in alleging that premillennialists teach a merely “Jewish” or “Palestinian” kingdom in the Millennium. Yet premillennialism in itself no more teaches that our Lord’s thousand-year earth-rule will be merely a “Jewish” or “Palestinian” kingdom than an historian would teach that the far-flung British Empire in its mightiest days was merely the little “kingdom of England”. What we *do* teach, with our eye on many a wonderful verse of the prophetic Scriptures, is that although Jerusalem will indeed be the geographical centre, and a regenerated Israel the nucleus of that coming reign, the “kingdom” will be a *global dominion* over all lands and peoples; the climax-era of our *race’s* history.

Is it true, as the amillennialists teach, that “God no longer deals with them [Israel] as a chosen nation”, and that Israel as a *nation* has “no prophesied future”? I think at once of solemn, unmistakable divine pledges which utterly refute that amillennial aberration. Jeremiah, above all others, was the weeping prophet who forewarned his countrymen of fearful judgment soon to break the nation in pieces. Yet again and again amid his foretelling of disintegration, exile, and dispersion, he comes back to Jehovah’s vow *never* to cast off finally His chosen, punished people as a nation, but ultimately to restore them permanently.

“Though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I *not* make a full end of *thee*” (Jer. 30: 11).

“Thus saith Jehovah, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; Jehovah of hosts is his name: if those ordinances depart from before me, saith Jehovah, then the *SEED OF ISRAEL* also shall cease from being a *NATION* before me for ever. Thus saith Jehovah; if heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all *THE SEED OF ISRAEL* for all that they have done, saith Jehovah. Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that the *CITY* shall be built to Jehovah from the tower of Hananeel unto the gate of the corner” (Jer. 31: 35–38).

“Moreover the word of Jehovah came to Jeremiah, saying: Considerest thou not what this people have spoken, saying, The *TWO FAMILIES* which Jehovah hath chosen, he hath even cast them off? [just as the amillennialists are now saying!]. Thus they have despised my people, that they should be no more a *NATION* before thee. Thus saith Jehovah: If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; then will I cast away the *SEED OF JACOB AND DAVID MY SERVANT*, so that I will not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of *ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB*: for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them” (Jer. 33: 23–26).

Or take the following two tremendous utterances of God on His oath to David and His covenant with the two families of Judah and Israel:

“My mercy will I keep for him [David] for evermore, and *MY COVENANT* shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, *AND HIS THRONE* as the days of heaven. If his children forsake My law, and walk not in My judgments . . . then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. *Nevertheless My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail. MY COVENANT WILL I NOT BREAK*, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips. Once have I *SWORN IN MY HOLINESS* that I will not lie unto David. His *SEED* shall endure for ever, and His *THRONE* as the sun before Me” (Psalm 89: 28–37).

“Thus saith Jehovah: If ye can break my covenant of the day, and My covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; then may also *MY COVENANT* be broken with *DAVID* My servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne” (Jer. 33: 20–21).

With undiminished respect to my amillennial brethren, cannot but say that as for myself, when I read such solemn, sworn oaths of God, so specifically pledged to the actual *nation*, Israel, I consider it a daring, irreverent impertinence either to *spiritualise* the words so as to make them mean the Church, or to say that God has now *cast off* Israel as a nation.

But of course, going with these most solemn guarantees, there are all those wonderful and equally explicit foretellings of a wonderful regathering and renewing and expanding of that covenant nation at the end of the present age. One quotation only must here serve as a representative of the many.

“And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a Branch out of his roots shall bear fruit. . . . With righteousness shall He judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth; and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked. . . . The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fattling together; and a little child shall lead them. . . . And it shall come to pass in that day, that the root of Jesse which standeth for an ensign of the peoples, unto Him shall the nations seek; and His resting-place shall be glorious. And it shall come to pass in that day, that Jehovah will set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people, which still remain, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And He will set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four comers of the earth. The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and they that vex Judah shall be cut off. . . . And in that day thou [Israel] shalt say: I will give thanks unto Thee, O Jehovah; for though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortest me . . . Cry aloud and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion; for great in the midst of Thee is the Holy One of Israel” (Isa. 11 and 12).

To my own mind, three things are very plain in that Isaian prediction: (1) *Its reference is to the nation Israel*: “Root of Jesse”, “outcasts of Israel”, “dispersed of Judah”, “Ephraim”, “inhabitant of Zion.” (2) *Its fulfilment is still future*: “He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth” etc. (which Jesus the Root of Jesse has not yet done). “Unto Him shall the nations

seek”, etc. “He shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four comers of the earth.” (3) *Its wording and contents are inapplicable to the Church and the present Gospel age.* The Church is not the assembling of the “outcasts of Israel” and “the dispersed of Judah”; neither can the Church say, “Thou wast angry with me, but Thine anger is turned away”! Yet this is an amillennial comment on it:

“The eleventh chapter of Isaiah, however, presents under appropriate symbolism the truth of our Lord’s first advent, the response of the Gentiles to the Gospel, and the ultimate deliverance of the groaning creation from the curse of sin. It is not a prediction of a millennial kingdom in Palestine. To be sure the eleventh verse says, ‘the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people’, but we have every right to take notice of the kingdoms from which His people are to be gathered—kingdoms which are no longer in existence. At the beginning of the Christian era God did gather a remnant from these lands through the preaching of the Gospel.” “He [Isaiah] is naturally referring in many places to his people’s return from their captivity in Assyria and Babylon, but that is the only Jewish restoration of which he speaks”.

But, with sincere respect to the writer, is not that a compound of contradictions? First, although this Isaian passage foretells a regathering of the Judah-Israel nation, the above quotation says that “under appropriate symbolism” it foretells “the response of the *Gentiles* to the Gospel”!

Next, although this Isaian passage clearly says that the regathering of Judah-Israel is to synchronise with a reign of David’s royal “Branch” who “smites the earth” and “slays the wicked”, and “cuts off” all that “vex Judah” (none of which has yet happened) our amillennialist says that it was God’s gathering of a “remnant” through “the preaching of the Gospel” away back “at the beginning of the Christian era”!

Next, although our amillennial author says that this restoration of the Israel “remnant” was those who were won [to Christ and the Church] by the preaching of the Gospel, he strangely enough adds that the Jewish “return

from their captivity in *Assyria and Babylon*” is “the *only* Jewish restoration of which he [Isaiah] speaks”!

Next, our amillennial friend argues against a literal interpretation of this Isaian passage, in that God could not regather scattered Israel from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, and other such “kingdoms which are *no longer in existence*.” Then how (we ask) did God bring back the “Remnant” from Assyria in 536 B.C., after the Babylonian exile (which our amillennialist agrees God did) when Assyria even *then* was “no longer in existence”—having been destroyed by Babylon, and Babylon also having been destroyed by Media-Persia?

Finally, our amillennial transcript says that the predicted regathering was fulfilled in those Jews who were won “through the preaching of the Gospel” at the “beginning of the Christian era”; yet elsewhere the same book insists that the overthrow of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was the most awful decimation and deadly *scattering* of the Jews. If, then, the “beginning of the Christian era” was the final and most awful *scattering* of the Jews, how could it possibly fulfil the Isaian prediction of a final and most glorious *regathering* of them? The further one goes, the bigger the contradictions become, until one wonders how such sincere and able brethren can espouse such obviously artificial misadaptations.

If, as the lame theory says, this predicted “gathering together the dispersed of Judah from the four quarters of the earth” was the comparatively small number of Jews converted to Christianity at the beginning of our Christian era, what about such verses as 6 to 10?

“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters cover the sea.”

That has *never* been fulfilled in the Church or the Gospel age and never will be. Millions and millions this very day have never even heard the name of Jesus, and have no chance of doing so in their earthly life. In their many millions they are utterly destitute of “the knowledge of Jehovah”. The prediction awaits fulfilment after the return of Christ and the bringing in of His visible reign on earth, as we premillennialists have always held. Even amillennialists *must* push such predictions as that into the yet-future,

beyond our Lord's return. Their only possible difference from us is that *they* would say it belongs to our Lord's *eternal* kingdom, not just to a "millennium". Yet if they say *that*, then how do they explain all those references which stamp the prediction as primarily concerned with Israel's "outcasts" and Judah's "dispersed"? Is there going to be an Israel-and-Judah emphasis persisting even in our Lord's *eternal* kingdom? We must leave our amillennialists to sort that out themselves.

Some of the restoration predictions are of such wording and dimension that to say they were fulfilled at the "return of the remnant" with Zerubbabel in 536 B.C. is nothing less than paltry. I here cull only one as representative of many. It is Ezekiel 11: 16–20, and it is the more significant because it comes after paragraphs which tell in frightening words the judgments and dispersal which were coming to the covenant people.

"Thus saith the Lord GOD: Although I have cast them far off among the nations, and although I have scattered them among the countries . . . I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the *LAND* of Israel. And they shall come *THITHER* and they shall take away all the detestable things thereof and all the abominations thereof from thence. And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: that they may walk in My statutes, and keep Mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be My people, and I will be their God."

To *spiritualise* such a passage into meaning the *Church*, or to pretend that it was fulfilled in the feeble "remnant" which returned to Judea with Zerubbabel is preposterous. There, however, for the time being we leave our animadversions on amillennialism. For a full treatment of its arguments and aspects perhaps I may be permitted to refer any interested reader to my book, *The Age After This*.

We are gratified to think that the apostle Paul stands squarely with all of us Premillennialists in his comments on the nation Israel in Romans 11. (Remember, Paul's declarator in that chapter is written *after* our Lord's

crucifixion, i.e. after the event from which, according to amillennialism, God finally broke off His covenant relation with the nation Israel.)

“Hath God cast away His people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. *GOD HATH NOT CAST AWAY HIS PEOPLE WHICH HE FOREKNEW.*”

“For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so *all Israel* [i.e. after that] shall be *saved*: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from *Jacob*.”

“For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance [i.e. without revocation].’—verses 1, 2, 25–29.

Every reference to Israel throughout the context shows that Paul is speaking about the *national* Israel; and the expression “Jacob” is *never* used otherwise throughout both Old and New Testaments. I maintain that it is impossible to be true to Paul’s clear wording, yet *spiritualise* it into meaning, not “Jacob-Israel”, but the *Church*.

For our purpose in these present studies I need not ask anyone to accept *in toto* the “Brethren” or “Scofield” scheme of “dispensations”, any more than I myself do; but I hold that if we are to have a truly strategic grasp of the Bible we simply must accept the following propositions:

1. That the Old and New Testaments, respectively, represent two great divine covenants, and two major divine dispensations, which stand in emphatic contrast to each other, and must never be confused.
2. That the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants of God with the earthly descendants of Abraham as a covenant people and separated nation have never been disannulled.
3. That all those Scripture promises and prophecies which are clearly worded to or of the nation Israel must be interpreted accordingly, and *not* spiritualised into covert references to the *Church*.
4. That the wonderful but as yet obviously unfulfilled promises and predictions of an ultimate regathering, regeneration and blessing of the covenant nation Israel and a worldwide Messianic reign will yet *be* fulfilled.

5. That in accord with the further light of New Testament revelation, the promised age of fulfilment will begin at the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in “power and glory”, at which time He will “rapture” the Church, and become recognised by “all Israel” as Messiah-Saviour-King, and inaugurate His world-girdling Messianic reign on earth.

With those basic realities clear in our thinking, we are ready to appreciate equally clearly the other fascinating and edifying disclosures of Scripture which are bound up with them. Some of these we shall examine in the following pages.

¹ Our English word, “dispensation”, represents the Greek *oikonomia*. As Charles Hodge notes, when used of one in authority it means an administrative plan or scheme. When used of those *under* authority it means a stewardship or responsible managing. It is in the former connection that the word has its theological significance.

DIVERGENT VIEWS OF “THE KINGDOM”

Since these chapters were finished, there has come into our hands Dr. Alva J. McClain's monumental work, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, perhaps the most comprehensive work on the "kingdom of God" ever published. In his second chapter Dr. McClain distinguishes *eight* different concepts of the kingdom: (1) the National—or Jewish, (2) the Millennial—or futuristic, (3) the Celestial—or reign of God in heaven, (4) the Ecclesiastical—which identifies it with the Church, either organized or spiritual or both, (5) the Spiritual—or inner reign of God over yielded human hearts, (6) the Moral—or ethical, (7) the Social—or Liberalist adaptation of it, (8) the Modern-type Eschatological—as a kingdom either phantasmal or supra-historical.

After due reflection I decided to let my own presentation of *six* divergent views stand, without alteration, as in this ensuing chapter; but I would take opportunity here to recommend Dr. McLain's great work on the "Kingdom" to all who would study the full Biblical data in masterly presentation.

J.S.B.

DIVERGENT VIEWS OF “THE KINGDOM”

ANYONE reading for the first time through the four Gospels is bound to see that our Lord Jesus was continually speaking about a kingdom—a “kingdom of heaven” or “kingdom of God”. To read those same narratives a hundred times cannot but confirm the impression that His kingdom was distinctively the speciality of our Lord’s preaching and teaching.

Scarcely do we read a couple of pages inside the New Testament before John the Baptist meets us with his, “Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” A few paragraphs later our Lord Himself emerges upon His public ministry with the same call: “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Soon after, in a summarising review, Matthew says, “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the *kingdom*.” Then follow’s the Sermon on the Mount, which, besides being a moral manifesto of the kingdom, makes clear that the very *raison d’etre* of the new Prophet’s claim upon the public ear was His proclamation of this kingdom. A little later the compendious comment recurs that “Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the *kingdom*” (Matt. 9: 35). When He sends forth the twelve disciples His instruction is, “As ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (10: 7). So do we find it, right to the end of the Gospel.

At once, then, we may say that to understand what this “kingdom of heaven” means is of first importance. It is so for the following four reasons.

First: this “kingdom” was undoubtedly the earliest, the continued, and the dominant subject of our Lord’s public ministry.

Second: there is an obvious difference of emphasis between the Gospels and the Epistles. In the Gospels the “kingdom” is named 113 times; in all the Epistles only 20. In the Acts and the Epistles “church” or “churches” occurs no times; in the Gospels only 3. The mere counting of references by

name to a subject can sometimes be misleading, but in this instance it is surely clear that a wide difference is indicated. If it be said that in the four Gospels the references by Mark and Luke largely duplicate those by Matthew, we only need to reply that in Matthew alone there are 52, as against 13 in the whole of the Epistles when similar duplications are deleted. Such a wide difference of emphasis simply must have a corresponding significance which we should seek to understand.

Third: there is a complex and unhappy divergence of interpretation on the subject. Many assume that the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God and the Church are all one and the same. Others hold that the Church is altogether separate, but that the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are identical. Still others insist that all three are different; the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are *not* one and the same. There are even further variations and sub-dividings. Which, then, is right?

Fourth: if the “kingdom” was our Lord’s special subject, and if there is some big change-over in the Epistles, and if there is such disagreement of interpretation, then the obligation to seek the real truth is as serious as it is sacred; the more so because what we hold about the “kingdom” deeply affects our view of what we are meant to preach, and of God’s present purpose in the world, and of how the present age is to end.

What, then, should be our approach? It should be to ask first what our Lord meant by His expression, “the kingdom of heaven”. Other expressions like “the kingdom of God” and “the Church” will present themselves in due order.

In seeking to ascertain what our Lord meant by “the kingdom of heaven”, our method will be (a) to state the several rival theories; (b) to eliminate those which may be proved erroneous; (c) to expound what we believe to be the truth, and then test it against criticism. The main rival theories seem to be six in number, so far as we have found:

1. The Idealistic
2. The British Israel
3. The Dispensationalist
4. The “Social Gospel”
5. The Spiritual
6. The Messianic.

THE IDEALISTIC THEORY

According to the idealistic theory, the kingdom of heaven is Christ's name for that which is the ultimate moral and spiritual ideal of human life. This ideal, this moral and spiritual reality, we should seek to "see" by inward perception, and then translate it into practice, individually, socially, politically, generally. Christ had "seen" it and was sure of it. He sought to share it, by His teaching and life, as His supreme mission.

There is a seeming vapour of mysticism about this idealistic view of the kingdom of heaven, yet it is unselfishly social rather than selfishly contemplative, as those who have advocated it have shown by their conduct.

Perhaps the fairest way to exhibit this idealistic theory of the kingdom is to quote from a book which I read years ago, by A. Clutton Brock.

"Is there a kingdom of heaven at all, and who can assure us of it? Christ Himself was very sure of it; and therefore we may suppose He meant something precise by it. What did He mean?

"Now it is clear, in the first place, that He meant something here and now, something we can see if we will, a reality more real than what is perceived with the senses; a reality which, when once it is perceived, will transform a man's thought and feeling and conduct.

"There are moments when all of us have glimpses of it, and of that certainty which Christ promises, that the universe is not a fraud. They are the moments when we know we are living well, when we lose the sense that our life is a mere routine with no aim that we can value. And these moments come to us, not when we are doing our duty so that we may acquire merit, nor when we are worshipping God with the same object, but when we have utterly forgotten ourselves in something not ourselves that seems to us supremely good. That certainty of supreme goodness, of absolute value, comes to us only when we forget ourselves utterly. In it alone do we attain to happiness; for always this happiness means *belief*.

“So conversion, which is *seeing* the kingdom of heaven, is necessary to a man before he can begin to believe at all. . . . This conversion, this seeing, is not instantaneous but gradual; it is part of the growth of the whole self. A man may make a sudden advance in it; but he must maintain that advance with the effort of the whole self. The kingdom of heaven is within as well as without us. It is of the will no less than of the perceptions.”

Now admittedly there is a certain aesthetic appeal about this idealistic concept of the kingdom which our Lord preached; but it must be rejected because it is not true to facts. It may have its head idealistically above the clouds, but it does not have its feet realistically planted on the *terra firma* of New Testament data. Its advocates have a preconceived idea in their minds when they come to our Lord's phrase, “the kingdom of heaven”, and they attach that preconceived idea to our Lord's phrase because at first sight “the kingdom of heaven” seems the very name that fits the idea.

That kind of kingdom is not really a kingdom at all; but even if we call it a kingdom it is an idea and an ideal which have *always* been in the world; whereas both John the Baptist and our Lord Himself came announcing the kingdom of heaven as something definitely *historical*, something which in point of time was now “*at hand*”, and which had *not* existed before.

One wonders how those who hold the idealistic view can read many of our Lord's kingdom sayings without seeing its utter incompatibility. What about Matthew 7: 21, 22, where our Lord clearly makes the coming of the kingdom *future* in the words, “that day” and “then”? What about chapter 11: 11, 12, where He says that although a greater than John the Baptist was never born, John himself was not in the kingdom? If the kingdom were purely idealistic, John would certainly be in it, for he was “filled with the Holy Spirit” from his very birth. What about our Lord's words in chapter 16: 19, where He hands over the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” to Peter? How could He have handed over the keys of a mere idealism? What about chapter 16: 28, “Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom”?

We might run through the four Gospels, picking out such sayings on page after page, from the beginning to the end of our Lord's public ministry, but that is not required. We cite just two more, from the Olivet discourse. Looking right down the years to the end of the present age, Jesus says, "*Then* shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins. . . . *Then* they that were ready went in. . . ." And again, "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory. . . . *Then* shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, *inherit the kingdom* prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Is it not quite clear that all the way through, by His preaching and teaching about the kingdom of heaven, our Lord meant something far more than any merely idealistic concept?

THE BRITISH ISRAEL THEORY

I suppose that most who march under the banner of "British Israel" would agree that their movement never had a worthier penman than Dr. William Pascoe Goard. I knew him personally, heard him, read him, and appreciated him. I quote from his book, *The Kingdom of God*. In our quotation the name "Israel" must not be taken as meaning the Jews only, but in the British Israel sense, namely, the organised Celto-Saxon nations throughout the world.

"The kingdom of heaven *was* Israel in the past, as we read in the Biblical histories. The kingdom of heaven *shall be* Israel in the Millennium, as we read in the apocalyptic literature of the Bible. Israel also has been the national phase of the kingdom of heaven throughout the intervening centuries."

So, then, according to British Israel theory, the kingdom of heaven, past, present, future, is the people Israel, i.e. the Israel which consists today of "the nations of the Celto-Saxon people, divided into the British Empire and the U.S.A." Dr. Goard adds:

“The Gospel of the kingdom is the stepping-stone to the Gospel of salvation, ‘offering the Gospel to all in the Divinely appointed order, viz. first that which is natural, afterward that which is spiritual’.”

Dr. Goard’s idea about this kingdom being the “natural” which leads to the “spiritual” is a peculiar reversal of our Lord’s word that except a man is first “born again” of the *Spirit* he cannot “see” and cannot “enter” the *kingdom* of God! Moreover, the Jews to whom our Lord preached were willing enough to receive the “natural” kingdom, yet instead of leading them to the “spiritual” it had the very opposite effect!

However, dipping more deeply into Dr. Goard’s book, we pick out several categorical definitions of the kingdom.

“Britain and America are the Israel of the prophecies and form the kingdom-nation of God on the earth . . . it is indeed the throne of Jehovah which is threatened and attacked when nations march against Britain and the overseas Celto-Saxons.” “*The kingdom of God is biological*. It has its heart and the centre of its organisation in the Semitic people. Its racial foundation within the Semitic people is in Abraham and Sarah. By the triangular organisation of El Shaddai (God Almighty) Abraham and Sarah, who formed the basic family circle of the race, Isaac was born. He was a ‘mutation’ of the genus man, and from him descended that biological strain which forms the basis of the kingdom. That strain is continued in Jacob and in Israel. The date of the appearance of the Saxon strain is approximately 1896 B.C.”

“*The kingdom of God is ethnological*. The national basis of that kingdom is Israel, and the ethnological divisions of it consist of the nations into which the Israel people have been organised, and shall yet be organised. The kingdom became an ethnological fact in 1491 B.C. at the national organisation at Sinai, three months after the Exodus (Ussher).”

“*The kingdom of God is geographical*, having a central capital consisting of Zion and Jerusalem. It was organised at Sinai, thence transferred to Palestine, and thence to ‘the isles’. From thence it has

extended its boundaries to embrace the overseas dominions, the United States, etc.”

“The kingdom of God is chronological, having a specific date of birth—1896 B.C., when Isaac was born, and a specific date of organisation, namely, three months after the Exodus, in 1491 B.C. . . . That kingdom has furnished the backbone of world history from that date to this time.”

In clearly stated form, such is the British Israel case; and to our own mind it takes little refuting. Anyone conversant with Scripture as to the kingdom of heaven knows that it just will not fill the British Israel mould.

One’s mind immediately reverts to Daniel’s words about the image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, and to his own later visions about the future kingdom of the Messiah.

“Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them; and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.”

“And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.”

“I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”

Daniel 2: 34, 35, 44; and 7: 13, 14.

Whether the Celto-Saxon peoples of today are identifiable with the Israel tribes or not, a kingdom which (as is argued) began with Isaac in the

nineteenth century B.C. simply cannot be that kingdom which Daniel, thirteen centuries later, prophesied as being still *further* centuries in the future—a kingdom from heaven which “the God of heaven” should set up, under the Messiah, whom Daniel refers to as “One like the Son of Man”, *after* the course and destruction of the Gentile world-dominion. The one cannot be the other; and it is obviously with His mind on this Daniel phraseology that our Lord calls the kingdom which He came proclaiming, “the kingdom *of heaven*” and Himself “the *Son of Man*”.

To say that the earthly Israel people originated biologically with Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, is one thing (and we will agree with it). To say that the Celto-Saxon people of the world today are by ethnological continuation identifiable with the Israel Theocracy constituted at Sinai is another thing (which we do not believe). But to say that the earthly Israel kingdom was or is that kingdom which the Old Testament prophets predict as not yet coming until the Messiah himself inaugurates it, at a date which is *still* in the future, is surely exegetical gullibility.

One can only gasp, of course, at the engaging ease with which Dr. Goard assures us that the kingdom of heaven, having been “organised at Sinai” and thence “transferred to Palestine”, was later transferred to “the isles” (by which he means the British Isles), and that from those isles it has “extended its boundaries to embrace the overseas dominions, the United States, etc.” There is not a thread of *real* Scriptural evidence that the kingdom of heaven has any distinctive connection whatever with the British Isles, or that the Old Testament phrase “the isles” means the British Isles at all!

If the kingdom of heaven were only the nation Israel, or even the reign of Jehovah Himself in and through Israel from the Sinai covenant onwards, how could John the Baptist and our Lord Jesus have come saying, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand”? They would have been bringing *one* kingdom of heaven to *another* kingdom of heaven! Nothing can be clearer than that the kingdom of heaven which John heralded and our Lord presented was something *not* identical with Israel the nation itself, whether we use the name “Israel” only of the Jews, or in the controversially wider British-Israel sense.

If all Israelites are in the kingdom of heaven by *birth*, how strange are our Lord’s words in Matthew 5: 20, “Except your righteousness shall

exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case *enter* into the kingdom of heaven"! And to refer again to John the Baptist, how strange it is to find Jesus averring that although John certainly was in and of the nation Israel, he was *not* in the kingdom of heaven! What about our Lord's words, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not *enter* into the kingdom of heaven"? These are verses and questions (not to mention others) which immediately leap to mind and protest against the British Israel theory of the kingdom of heaven.

One cannot help reverting to Daniel 2: 44, which tells us that the "kingdom of the God of heaven" (i.e. the "kingdom of heaven") is to come "in the days of *those kings*" (i.e. of the feet and toes—right at the end of Nebuchadnezzar's dream-image), which means, of course, right at the end of the still-continuing "times of the Gentiles". In its sudden coming, that "kingdom of heaven" is to "*break in pieces* and consume" all those kingdoms. Will even "British-Israelites" be naive enough to say that this is going to happen through the now pitifully weakened British throne and nation, even with the help of problem-harassed America? The "signs of the times" are all the other way.

The ultimate fact, of course, is that this British Israel theory of the kingdom stands or falls with the validity or otherwise of the British Israel case as a whole. We ourselves believe that British Israelism is wrong.

THE DISPENSATIONALIST THEORY

A usual dispensationalist theory of the kingdom of heaven is that it now exists on earth in what is known as its "*mystery*" form. To be more explicit, the idea is that the Messianic kingdom, having been offered to the Jews and then rejected by them, still continues on earth, and will do so until the second coming of Christ, as "the sphere of *Christian profession*"—the practical equivalent of which is *Christendom*.

This dispensationalist theory is most popularly sponsored by the "Scofield" Bible. Before I quote from it, let me pay appreciative tribute. In my own judgment many of its notes and summaries are "pure gold". I have used it for forty years, and with oft-repeated thanks to God have profited from it beyond measure; but its theory of the kingdom "in *mystery* form" I

believe to be exegetically out of focus. Take the following two quotations from notes on Matthew 13. (The italics are our own.)

“The seven parables of Matthew 13, called by our Lord ‘mysteries of the kingdom of heaven’ (v. 11), taken together, describe the result of the presence of the *Gospel* in the world during the *present age*, that is, the time of seed-sowing which began with our Lord’s personal ministry, and will end with the ‘harvest’ (vv. 40-43). The result is the mingled tares and wheat, good fish and bad, in the sphere of *Christian* profession. It is *Christendom*.”

“Such, then, is the *mystery* of the kingdom (see Matt. 3: 2, note; 6: 33, note). It is the *sphere of Christian profession* during this age. It is a mingled body of true and false, wheat and tares, good and bad. It is defiled by formalism, doubt, and worldliness. But within it Christ sees the true children of the true kingdom who, at the end, are to ‘shine forth as the sun’. In the great field, the world, He sees His treasure that He redeems for His own through His cross. Thus, in this aspect of the kingdom, He sees the Church, His body and bride composed of believing Israelites and Gentiles, and for joy sells all that He has (2 Cor. 8: 9) and buys the field, the treasure, and the pearl.”

To my own mind, the first and most obvious disqualification of this “kingdom-in-mystery-form” theory is, that it contradicts the plain words of our Lord Jesus. That fault, indeed, is fatal to it. In explaining the parable of the tares among the wheat our Lord clearly said, “the field is the *world*” (Matt. 13: 38), yet the Scofield note says, “The parable of the wheat and tares is *not* a description of the *world*, but of that which *professes* to be the *kingdom*” (italics ours). Is not such divergence from our Lord strange exposition? Our Lord nowhere equates the rejected kingdom with the “world”, or with a so-called “sphere of *Christian* profession”, or with a “mystery form” of existence in the present age. Such a notion has to be “read *into*” what He said, and then (as just shown) it contradicts His clear wording.

What our Lord designs to show, by His parables in Matthew 13, is not a continuation of the kingdom in some shadowy disguise or “mystery form”

throughout the long interval of this present Church age, but its actual *aisuspension* while He Himself, its King, is physically absent. The very location of these parables is a first guide to this. They occur immediately after our Lord's summing up of reactions to His kingdom message: "this generation"—unresponsive (11: 17), the Galilean "cities"—unrepentant (11: 20), the Pharisees—unreasonable (12: 10, 14, 24), the multitude—undiscerning (13: 13-15). It is clear that in the seven parables of Matthew 13 our Lord is assessing the results thus far. The first of the parables (the Sower) gives the key, showing that only a small fraction of the multitudes were "good soil" hearers (18-23). His verdict on the people as a whole is seen in verses 13 to 15. The other six parables are meant to reveal, though in partly veiled form, certain far-reaching truths hitherto unreleased concerning the *postponement* of the Messianic kingdom, which postponement would now follow as a permitted consequence of Israel's selfblinding imperviousness.

The parable of the wheat and the tares (13: 24-30) is of special importance because it is one of the only two parables which our Lord privately explained to the disciples (36-43). The good Sower is the "Son of Man". The field is "the world". The good seed are the true "children of the kingdom". The tares are the "children of the wicked one"; and the "enemy" who sowed them is "the devil". The harvest is "the end of the age". The reapers are "the angels". The parable ends, "*THEN* [i.e. at the end of the age] shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the *KINGDOM* of their Father." Now this sending forth of angels when the Son of Man returns at the end of the present age, and the setting up of the kingdom *then*, is found again and again in the New Testament. Our Lord Himself directly states it in His Olivet discourse. The kingdom comes "THEN", and not before.

What our Lord did *not* disclose in the parable was that the "THEN" was so far away, with the present dispensation of grace intervening. *That* could not very well have been revealed, else the continued offer of the kingdom to Israel by our Lord and His apostles would have become merely theatrical, whereas it was thoroughly genuine; the nation's free will was respected, and events were allowed to take their course accordingly. It is the divine foreknowledge which speaks in these parables, divulging what was to happen in view of Israel's *foreknown* behaviour. The setting up of the kingdom was to be postponed.

Historically, the decisive fact is, that from A.D. 70, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and disintegrated Judaeon Jewry, the “kingdom of heaven” has no more been offered to the Jews. What *is* being preached in this present dispensation, to individual Gentiles and Jews alike, is *personal salvation* through the Saviour whose Calvary death made atonement for all mankind. The idea must be rejected that in this present dispensation the “children of the kingdom” are one and the same as regenerated Christian believers. The Spirit-born members of our Lord’s mystic “body” and “bride” are far more than “children of the kingdom” in the way our Lord meant. For when the kingdom actually comes, they (the regenerated members of His *ecclesia*) will enter that kingdom, not as *subjects* only, but to “reign *with* Christ” (as other Scriptures show). If it should be said that the “children of the kingdom” *must* be on earth somewhere today because they were to “grow together” with the tares *until* the “end of the age”, we reply that the “end of the age” has a *twofold* bearing, arising from the intervening of the present Church dispensation. There is a real sense in which the end of *that* age, when our Lord spoke, came long ago, when the fearful judgment of A.D. 70 ended Jewish statehood and brought “great tribulation” the like of which had never before been known. Up to that time the Messianic kingdom had been offered to the Jews, first by our Lord in person (in the Gospels), then through the Apostles (in the Acts); but Israel’s double refusal had now become crystallised into unmistakable fixity. Judgment fell. That age ended. The kingdom offer was withdrawn. There came a suspension. Meanwhile there swings into view God’s further purpose, the wonderful new movement through the *Church*, in this present dispensation of grace.

As the end of this *present* age draws on there will be a *resumption* of conditions exactly as when they were broken off two thousand years ago, especially in relation to the earthly Israel. Now, as long ago, there are the “godly” in Israel. They are not Christian believers. “Blindness” still “happens” to them. But they are the *godly* of the natural Israel. When our Lord reappears in His second-advent splendour, not only will there be astounding recognition of Him by all Israel, and intensely penitent sorrow in millions of them, but our Lord will set up His kingdom on exactly the same moral and spiritual basis as He specified two thousand years ago. It shall be for the godly, the meek, the upright (according to Matthew 5: 3-12,

and 13: 43); and at the same time He shall “gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity” (13: 41, with Isa. 11: 4).

The *other* parables of Matthew 13 will at that same time take up their suspended fulfilment, the mustard seed becoming the great tree, and the leaven spreading through the whole of the meal. If we try to make those and the other parables refer to the *present*, we at once run into difficulties. For instance, our Lord says with unmistakable plainness, “the kingdom of heaven is like unto *leaven*”, yet the Scofield note contradicts this, saying that the “leaven is the *principle of corruption* working subtly”. Ought we not to keep strictly to our Lord’s own wording? In the mustard seed and the leaven—the one buried in the ground yet eventually a great tree, the other hidden in the meal yet eventually filling the whole, our Lord surely pictures the then-rejected kingdom as similarly being now hidden, or removed from view, but at last reappearing in a spreading and all-pervading greatness.

Instead of some supposed present “mystery-form” of the kingdom on earth, there is a present *suspension*; but when our Lord returns all these parables will suddenly “come alive” with new activity again. We cannot go further into all this here; but perhaps we may be allowed to refer to our treatment of Matthew 13 in volume 5 of *Explore the Book*.

Meanwhile, appreciating full well the attitudes of present-day amillennialist brethren on the one hand and hyper-dispensationalists on the other, we respectfully maintain that the only consistent basis on which to interpret the parables of Matthew 13 is, that the “kingdom of heaven” is *suspended* for the duration of the present age. As soon as we try to read the “Church” or a so-called “*spiritual* Israel” into those parables (as do the amillennialists), or if we try to make them teach a present-age “mystery form” of the kingdom as the “sphere of *Christian profession*” (after the Scofield-type dispensationalists) we fall into misreading the wording (so it seems to me) or rendering our Lord’s parabolic figures inapplicable.

THE “SOCIAL GOSPEL” THEORY

Like certain other plausible new emphases, the “Social Gospel” evolved from and with the latter-day “higher critical” attitude to the Bible. It alleged that the older, evangelical type of Christianity had been so concerned with

men's souls that it forgot they had bodies; it was so occupied in getting men ready for eternity, it did nothing to improve housing and working conditions here on earth. Heaven knows that synchronising with the new industrialising and urbanising of human society there came (and still linger) huge social problems. The champions of the "new outlook" on the Bible and on humanity had discovered that the Gospel has great *social* implications; and they were going to show how the *social* application of Christianity would transform human behaviour.

Obsession with social reform soon began to equate a "better social order" with the "kingdom of God". The Church became looked upon mainly as God's intended means for the bringing in of this better or "Christianized" order of society. Capitalist injustices were deplored and denounced. Class distinctions became intolerably inhuman. From my own direct contacts with ministers of the "Social Gospel" persuasion, I know that many of them—some vaguely, others boldly—view the "kingdom of God" as a Christianized form of socialism.

As Dr. Alva J. McClain says, "According to this emphasis, the Kingdom of God is the progressive social organization and improvement of mankind, in which society rather than the individual is given first place. The main task of the Church is, therefore, to establish a Christian Social Order which in turn will actually make 'bad men do good things'. As a modern movement this notion began with the cult of 'Christian Socialism' under the leadership of J. F. D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley." "In the long history of special interpretations of the Kingdom of God, there has been none more one-sided or guilty of greater excesses than this Social-Kingdom conception. With fanatical zeal some of its champions have been ready to scrap almost anything in the realm of Christian faith and morals if only the process of 'social reconstruction' could be somehow advanced. Gandhi, who never renounced the degraded religion of India, was lauded as the greatest 'Christian' of his generation. Opportunist politicians of the worst kind were supported on the ground that they advocated 'progressive social principles'. Even Russian Communism, its hands bloody with mass murder, was held up as a beneficent forward step in the social progress of mankind." "As the movement ran its course, the Kingdom of God became a 'democracy' in which man and God (if there is a God!) struggled together for the social redemption of mankind." (*See our flyleaf note to this chapter.*)

We will say nothing here about the *failure* of the “Social Gospel” to achieve its fond goals, except that its devotees would probably explain any such failure as being largely due to those of us who do not see things as they themselves do. Moreover, in many recent developments—industrial, environmental, educational, trade-union and others, they think they see the certain *signs* that the “kingdom” is inevitably coming.

Doubtless, a new emphasis on remedying social wrongs was only too sorely needed; but to confuse *that* with the New Testament teaching as to the “kingdom of heaven” or “kingdom of God” is just as wrong as the whole attitude of the modern theological Liberal himself is wrong toward the inspiration of the Bible.

THE SPIRITUAL THEORY

Undoubtedly, this is the commonest idea among Evangelical Christians: the kingdom of heaven is a *spiritual* kingdom. Many hold this idea more or less vaguely, having almost involuntarily assumed it through its being so long handed down, and so generally taken for granted. There are others, however, including many able expositors, who sponsor it as their studied exegetical position.

According to this view, the kingdom of heaven is practically the same as the Church, that is, the Church considered in its more spiritual aspects. I know that some who hold it try to make out a semblance of difference between the two, but they have to make the Church a *part*, or “aspect”, of the kingdom; and they cannot avoid merging the two into being identical *practically*, however different etymologically.

This idea that the kingdom of heaven is a purely spiritual kingdom is what the generality of our churches are teaching today. Much is said about spreading “the ethics of Christ” or “the principles of Christianity” or “the influence of the Gospel”, and thereby extending “the *kingdom* of our Lord”, until (as many seem to hope) the whole world becomes, so to speak, churchkingdomised, either gradually or by special Divine intervention.

It is a concept which seems to have been handed on from the Middle Ages via the Protestant Reformers; and it accounts for those small-print synopses at the head of Old Testament chapters in many editions of our

King James Version, where, although the prophecies are on Israel or other nations, they are referred to the *Church*. Let anyone read Isaiah 19, 30, 33, 34, 41, 43, not to mention other chapters, and see if they have the slightest reference to the New Testament church! Yet these are the headings in usual editions:

- 19. "Confusion of Egypt. Calling of Egypt into the church."
- 30. "The people threatened for their confidence in Egypt. And contempt of God's word. His mercy to the church."
- 33. "God's judgments against the enemies of the church."
- 34. "Judgments with which God avenges His church."
- 41. "God displays His merciful providence in regard of His church."
- 43. "The Lord comforts the church with His promises."

Is it not a strange form of Biblical exegesis which allows all the foretellings of judgment on Israel to remain applicable to that nation, but takes all the promises of coming blessing on Israel and diverts them to the Church?

Some representative quotations.

Let us see this theory as worded by some of its representative penmen, both earlier and present-day. We turn first to Dr. Charles Hodge's "Systematic Theology", volume 2, section on the *Nature of Christ's Kingdom*.

"As religion is essentially spiritual, an inward state, the kingdom of Christ, as consisting of the truly regenerated, is not a visible body, except so far as goodness renders itself visible by its outward manifestations. Nevertheless, as Christ has enjoined upon His people duties which render it necessary that they should organise themselves in an external society, it follows that there is and must be a visible kingdom of Christ in the world. Christians are required to associate for public worship, for the admission and exclusion of members, for the administration of the sacraments, for the maintenance and propagation of the truth. They therefore form themselves into churches, and collectively constitute the visible

kingdom of Christ on earth, consisting of all who profess the true religion, together with their children.”

Dr. Hodge does indeed add that there will be a *Kingdom of Glory* “when Christ shall come again”; though even in that connection he says, “None but the regenerate or converted can enter that kingdom”, and he is not sure whether it is to be “on this earth, regenerated and fitted for this new order of things”, or in “heaven” as the “final home of the redeemed”. The one thing which I here emphasize is that this spiritual theory of the kingdom really makes kingdom and church practically *one*. This, so far as I know, is still the position of that influential denomination to which Dr. Hodge belonged (the Presbyterian), and of other denominations too, speaking generally.

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, may well be proud of its former principal, Dr. E. Y. Mullins, and his princely volume, *The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression*. In the index of that scholarly work I find “Kingdom of God”, but not “Kingdom of Heaven”. Nor is there any special section of the work devoted to the “kingdom” such as there is in Dr. Hodge’s larger work. Recurrent references, however, leave no doubt that he takes for granted the same spiritual view of the kingdom. On page 304 he writes:

“In the New Testament, as King, Christ founds the kingdom of God; He claims the obedience of men; He speaks with authority; works miracles; He claims all authority as Messiah; He establishes the ordinances; founds the Church; conquers death; commissions the disciples to preach the Gospel; ascends to the right hand of God; intercedes for His people; and will reign until all His enemies are subdued.”

Thus the kingdom is the *invisible reign* of a Christ now in heaven, over a *spiritual* kingdom in men’s hearts on earth here and now. Yet although this is so, Dr. Mullins sees no incongruity in saying that in a future sense the kingdom *comes* at Christ’s second coming. On page 456 we find, “So also the second coming of Christ. It is the equivalent of the coming of the kingdom.”

To quote just one more of these former denominational giants, I turn to Dr. W. N. Clarke’s *Outline of Christian Theology*, page 276.

“The idea of a kingdom of God was no new idea: it came over from the prophets, and formed an element in the Hebrew hope. To Jesus, however, the kingdom was no national organisation, no political institution; it was the *spiritual reign of God* in the actual life of men. To bring in such a reign of God Christ had come. . . . He would save men from sin, and bring them into the kingdom of God, the realm of grace, holiness, and right living as God’s own children.”

Moving away from the more staid old denominational theologians to two or three who may be said to represent novel theological modes during the last two hundred years, I advert to the Tübingen scholar, Ritschl. In a recent theological review, I am told that “in the various attempts to explain church and kingdom in relation to each other”, Ritschl’s is “the most famous of all”. Ritschl claimed to have “restored the kingdom to its proper place in the scheme of Christian thought”. One short quotation will be enough to floodlight his view.

“The community of believers, as subject of the worship of God and of the juristic institutions and organs which minister to that worship, is *Church*. As subject of the reciprocal action of its members, springing from the motive of love, it is *Kingdom of God*.”

In other words, take the perpendicular look, and believers are the *Church*; take the horizontal look, and believers are the *kingdom*. At best it is a distinction without a difference, as may be at once seen by reading Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, where this “reciprocal action of love”, which Ritschl applies to the *kingdom*, is (according to Paul) the special distinctive of the *Church*. However, the one point which I make is that again, according to Ritschl, kingdom and Church are really the same “community of believers”.

Crossing back to Britain, we find Principal Fairbairn more recently saying, in his *Christ in Modern Theology*,

“The kingdom is the immanent church; the church is the explicated kingdom; and nothing alien to either can be in the other. The kingdom *is* the church expressed in the terms and mind and

person of its Founder; the church *is* the kingdom done into living souls and the society they constitute.”

That recent, excellent Scottish scholar, Dr. James Denney, in his *Studies in Theology*, commenting on Matthew 16: 18, 19, says,

“It is worth remarking that in this passage the church and the kingdom of heaven are apparently alternative expressions for the same thing. ‘On this rock will I build My church. . . . I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom’; it is impossible to ignore the connection.”

So far as I know, that is the usual idea today among the Presbyterian churches of Scotland and elsewhere. Dr. Denney goes on to explain *why* the two terms, “kingdom” and “church”, appear in the New Testament as one and the same reality.

“When Jesus appeared among the Jews, preaching the glad tidings of the kingdom, He proclaimed the grace of God the Father in a form which made it accessible to Jewish minds. They had already the idea that God was their King, and that they themselves were, or were to be, citizens in the Divine kingdom. . . . But when the Gospel passed out of the Jewish circle altogether, what was the value of this form for the expression of it? In the synagogues it would still be possible to speak of the ‘kingdom’ of God, and hope to be understood; but to the mass of Gentile people in Asia, in Macedonia, in Greece, in Italy, it would convey nothing at all. Hence, the apostles practically dropped it [i.e. the word ‘kingdom’] and represented the social side of Christianity in the *ecclesia* or church.”

Yet surely in the above-quoted paragraph Dr. Denney’s explanation as to how the “Gospel” passed out of “the Jewish circle” does not fit the facts. The “Gospel” which passed out of the Jewish circle to the Gentile world at large certainly was very different from that “Gospel of the *kingdom*” which our Lord preached to the Jews. That kingdom message contained no message of individual salvation from sin through the atonement effected on

Calvary, for our Lord had not then died. And, until right at the end, our Lord's pre-intimatings of the Cross were confined to the Twelve. The "Gospel" of free grace which eventually "passed out of the Jewish circle" was something decidedly different from that of our Lord's discourses on the "kingdom". Therefore, to say, as Dr. Denney does, that the apostles "practically *dropped*" the usage of "kingdom" and substituted *ecclesia* or "church" merely for social or ethnic expediency is scarcely worthy of the facts. However, the one point here is that Dr. Denney, like all others who suppose that the kingdom of heaven is a purely *spiritual* kingdom, makes the kingdom and the Church practically identical with each other.

As already remarked, some who hold this spiritual idea of the kingdom *try* to make a semblance of difference between it and the Church. A well-expressed attempt at this may be cited from that great nineteenth-century Methodist theologian, Dr. William Burt Pope. His *Compendium, of Christian Theology*, volume 3, page 252, gives the following:

"*The church, as the kingdom of Christ, is essentially a spiritual authority over spiritual subjects. . . . It has indeed an outward organisation: laws and administration of law, rulers, and submission to rulers, terms of admission and penalties of excommunication. But all these are connected rather with the visible church, or visible churches, than with the kingdom of Christ, which is the glorious restoration of Divine authority over man; one, spiritual, ever enlarging and tending to its consummation in heaven. The KINGDOM has a meaning which the CHURCH has not.*"

But although Dr. Pope says, "The KINGDOM has a [larger] meaning which the CHURCH has not," he adds, in the same context, "The Christian church . . . *is* the kingdom of heaven." Later on he actually asserts that our Lord Himself decided to change the name "kingdom", to "church"!

"The phrase [i.e. 'kingdom of heaven'] pervades the Lord's teaching. Down to the last He was *speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*. It was not however His purpose that it should be retained as the name of His new community. . . . At a memorable crisis in His history our Lord gave His institution its new name: MY CHURCH."

We must not occupy further page-space with such quotations. Although the above-cited authors are deceased, their statements on the “kingdom” still represent the larger Protestant denominations and theological leadership. The kingdom of heaven is a *spiritual* kingdom, and practically the same in meaning as the *Church*.

That such still remains the accepted idea among the Protestant denominations, speaking generally, is indicated by some words which fell from the lips of Professor Karl Barth at a recent assembly of the World Council of Churches.

“If we are to think fruitfully about the Church and its task, and about social and international responsibilities, we must in all cases begin with God’s plan of salvation, which means with the kingdom of God, which has already come in Jesus Christ.”

Professor Reinhold Niebuhr expressed strong differences with him on some of the points which were unacceptable to the American liberal school, and charged Barth with “Biblical literalism”; but there was not a hint of difference as to Barth’s practically synonymizing of “the Church” and “the kingdom of God”.

Generally speaking, this concept of the kingdom as purely spiritual still “holds the field”. Yet this view of the kingdom, whether as purely spiritual or as economic-spiritual, is far from true to the full Biblical data. Nowadays, many who preach that idea of the kingdom are men who hold Liberalist or other loose ideas about the inspiration of the Bible. But whatever be one’s view of the Bible, this is surely true, that both the Old and New Testaments confront us with predictive statements and descriptive features which mean that the kingdom of heaven is *far more* than solely spiritual.

Those who continue to assert or assume that the promised “kingdom of heaven” is purely spiritual have to spiritualize, or ignore, or explain away, the most plainly worded Old Testament prophecies, along with equally clear utterances of our Lord Himself. They run counter to some of the most definite New Testament eschatology, and to some of our Lord’s best-known “parables of the kingdom of heaven.”

For instance, if the kingdom of heaven is a purely spiritual kingdom, practically equivalent to the Church, what about the “grain of mustard seed” which grows into a “great tree”?—and the “leaven” hid in the “three measures of meal” which spreads “until the whole is leavened”? The mustard seed and the leaven supposedly teach us that Christianity as the *spiritual* kingdom grows and spreads until the whole world is saved or Christianized. But, according to New Testament prophetic forecast, that is just what is *not* going to happen. The present age is *not* to end in a world-wide victory for a gradually all-pervading spiritual kingdom. It is to end in ecclesiastical apostasy, in days of accentuated godlessness, in the appearing of “the man of sin”, and in the crash at Armageddon.

Into that, however, we need not go further just here. Fuller answer will come in our next chapter: “What is the Kingdom of Heaven?”

WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN?

Any conception of the Kingdom of God which rests in large part upon a certain interpretation of a single text or passage of the Bible must be regarded with deep suspicion. In this category are the systems built around such passages as, "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17: 21), or "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16: 19), or the parable of the leaven (Matt. 13: 33), or the ethical precepts of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), or the 20th. chapter of the Book of Revelation. The doctrine of the Kingdom should be determined by an inductive examination of *all* the Biblical material on the subject, and it should not have to stand or fall by the inclusion or exclusion of isolated passages where interpretation may be in serious dispute.

Alva J. McClain, Th.M., D.D.,

LL.D.

WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN?

WHAT, then, is “the kingdom of heaven”? If (as we believe) the aforementioned theories of it are wrong, what is it in reality?

Not long ago I sat in a certain committee. The chairman was only recently back from an Assembly of the World Council of Churches. Incidental to our discussion, he observed, “One of the things which was obvious at the Assembly was an uncertainty as to what Jesus really meant by ‘the kingdom of heaven’.” I could not help thinking how strange, that although the kingdom of heaven was the dominating announcement and subject of our Lord’s teaching to the multitudes, here we were, two thousand years later, still asking what He really meant by it. Is not such vague uncertainty due to a misappreciation of certain facts which Scripture makes thoroughly plain to all who will receive them? Let me mention a few.

To begin with, it is an unmistakably indicative fact that when John the Baptist, and then our Lord Jesus, came preaching, “Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3: 2; 4: 17), neither of them said one word of explanation as to what the “kingdom of heaven” *was*. Why? Because, quite evidently, they were using a phrase which everybody knew, and which had a commonly understood meaning. Whenever a new philosopher or religious originator steps into publicity, the only terms or phrases or ideas which he does *not* trouble to explain are those which are commonly current with a generally accepted meaning. If by the “kingdom of heaven” John the Baptist and our Lord Jesus had been introducing a *new* concept, could they have done so with such a strange absence of all explanation? And how could John have happened to foreknow that the mind of Jesus was about to propound this hitherto unknown novelty? Or again, if Jesus had been going to use a well-known phrase but with a new meaning in it, how could John have happened to precognosce *that*?—and why did he not “prepare the way” by some sort of introductory elucidation?

But since neither John nor our Lord explained the phrase, “kingdom of heaven”, does any of the four Gospel penmen explain it? No. Although Matthew comes first in our New Testament, and reports our Lord’s teachings about the “kingdom of heaven” more fully than the other three, he never once inserts an explanatory comment. Nor does any other New Testament writer. Not once anywhere is the “kingdom of heaven” defined.

What, then, does this entire non-explanation denote? Surely it tells us that explanation in the sense of definition was unnecessary. When John and our Lord came preaching, “Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” they were referring to something publicly understood, namely, the long-promised Messianic kingdom which was the grand subject of Old Testament prophecy. Confirming this, the immediate and widespread excitement which their announcement stirred indicates that they were referring to a “kingdom of heaven” which was the subject of vibrant anticipation.

The fact is, those Jewish people of long ago knew well enough from their Scriptures, through the scribes and the synagogues, that the promised coming of the royal Messiah was ever drawing nearer. Indeed, there seems to have been at that time a quickened expectancy of His appearing to bring in the earnestly awaited kingdom which Jehovah had plainly promised and fore-described in page after page of the Prophets.

That was the supremely cherished expectation, not only of that old-time Palestinian Jewry, but of all those other Jewish kinsmen scattered throughout the world. It was based upon the covenant which God had made with David (2 Sam. 7), the expansive meaning of which is a dominant theme of the Prophets. The Davidic throne was to be restored and “established for ever” under David’s greater Son and Heir, the Messiah. He would be “Emmanuel”—“God with us” (Isa. 7: 14). The kingdom should centre in Israel but cover the whole earth. It should be heavenly in derivation and principles and authority, and be set up as a real, visible kingdom on earth by Jehovah, “the God of Heaven”. Its moral characteristics were to be righteousness, peace, equity, and true godliness.

That was the splendid hope, and expectancy ran high. When the Magi followed the star from the East to Jerusalem their enquiry was, “Where is He that is born *King of the Jews?*” And the Jewish scribes knew what to reply. They referred to Micah 5: 2, on which basis they said that Bethlehem

was the place “where the Christ should be born”. When our Lord interviewed Nicodemus (John 3) He spoke at once of the “kingdom of God” as a concern already familiar to Nicodemus’s mind. Joseph of Arimathea, also, was another of the many who “waited for the kingdom of God” (Mk. 15: 43).

Need we wonder that when John, the austere baptizer, suddenly appeared in the wilderness of Judea, with the resounding tones of a new prophet from Jehovah, calling for repentance, and announcing the impending appearance of the Messiah, and the drawing near of the “kingdom of heaven”, there was a startled, even precipitate response? Those Jewish people grasped the meaning at once: John and our Lord Jesus were referring to that hoped-for kingdom which was the glorious goal of their prophetic Scriptures.

If by the undefined term, “kingdom of heaven” our Lord had meant the *Church* of the present dispensation, His proclamation would have been wholly unintelligible to His hearers; for nowhere is the Christian Church, as such, the subject of Old Testament prediction.

Or, again, if by the “kingdom of heaven” our Lord had meant the *Gospel*, as we now commonly use that word, meaning “the grace of God which bringeth salvation” to all who by faith appropriate the atonement of Christ, He would have been equally unintelligible, unless He had first explained that He meant this. For the Gospel of Calvary is “good news” of personal salvation to individual men and women everywhere (“whosoever”), *not* the proclamation of a “kingdom” the offer of which our Lord Himself limited to the Jews (Matt. 10: 5, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles.” See also 15: 24).

Besides this, if by the “kingdom of heaven” our Lord had meant the Gospel of Calvary, He would have been preaching the *Cross*, whereas He neither mentions nor even hints at His anticipation of the Cross until toward the *end* of his public ministry, by which time His teaching concerning the kingdom was being plainly refused; and even then His reference to the Cross seems mainly if not wholly confined to the twelve Apostles (Matt. 16: 21, etc.).

We may well ask: If by the “kingdom of heaven” our Lord meant solely a *spiritual* kingdom, and not the Messianic kingdom predicted in the Old Testament, why was this left utterly unexplained? That question is the more

pertinent because those who say that Jesus taught a purely spiritual kingdom mean His reign in the hearts of those who receive Him as Sinbearer and Saviour. In other words, the spiritual kingdom consists of “Christians”—which again makes it practically synonymous with the Christian *Church*. That idea, however, does violence, not only to all our Lord’s eschatological teaching, but to much of what He said about Himself and the Old Testament, as we purpose to show.

So, then, in view of these facts: the entire non-explanation of the phrase, “kingdom of heaven”; the Jewish expectation of the promised kingdom which their Scriptures said the Messiah would inaugurate; and the unintelligibility of our Lord’s proclamation to those Jewish crowds if He had meant the Church, or the Gospel of free grace, or a spiritual kingdom; we lay down our first postulate, namely—

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS THE KINGDOM
PREDICTED IN (WHAT WE CHRISTIANS NOW CALL) THE
OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES; THE KINGDOM TO BE
BROUGHT IN BY ISRAEL’S MESSIAH.

In saying this we find ourselves in good, sound, scholarly company. That prince among theologians, the late Dr. James Orr, says, “In announcing the approaching advent of the ‘kingdom of heaven’ Jesus had in mind the very kingdom which the prophets had foretold.”¹ If, therefore, we would know the nature and features of that promised kingdom we must consult the Old Testament prophecies concerning it. The following excerpts will be sufficiently representative. Note particularly in them the words which we put in capitals, which indicate (too plainly to be “spiritualized”) that the promised kingdom is to be on this earth, an actual, visible, geographical kingdom; that it specially concerns the covenant nation Israel, yet reaches out to embrace “all nations” as such, and simply cannot denote a non-national, called-out minority such as an *ecclesia*, or “church”; that it is to be set up by Jehovah Himself, “The God of Heaven”, and brought in by the Messiah, who is to be its King to the end of time.

“The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning *JUDAH*
and *JERUSALEM*. It shall come to pass in the last days that the

mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established in the top of the mountains . . . and *all nations* shall flow into it . . . for out of ZION shall go forth the *LAW* and the word of Jehovah from *JERUSALEM*. And He shall *JUDGE* among [or between] the *NATIONS* [this is not 'grace' but international justice] and shall *REBUKE* [or give decision to] many peoples: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Is. 2: 1-4).

"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots; and the Spirit of Jehovah shall rest upon Him . . . and He shall not *judge* after the sight of His eyes, neither *reprove* after the hearing of His ears. But with righteousness shall He *judge* the poor and *reprove* with equity of the *meek of the earth*. And He shall *SMITE THE EARTH* with the rod of His mouth; and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked. [This is no picture of 'grace' or the 'Church'!]. Righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins . . . And it shall come to pass in that day that Jehovah shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people . . . And He shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the *OUTCASTS OF ISRAEL* and gather the *DISPERSED OF JUDAH* from the four corners of the earth" (Is. 11: 1-12).

"Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall *execute judgment and justice* in the earth. In His days *JUDAH* shall be saved, and *ISRAEL* shall dwell safely: and this is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. Therefore, behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that they shall no more say, Jehovah liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt: But Jehovah liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of *THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL* out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in THEIR OWN LAND" (Jer. 23: 5-8).

"Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will make a new covenant with the house of *ISRAEL*, and with the house of *JUDAH*:

Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith Jehovah: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of *ISRAEL*; after those days, saith Jehovah, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith Jehovah: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. Thus saith Jehovah, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; Jehovah of hosts is His name: If those ordinances depart from before Me, saith Jehovah, then the *seed of ISRAEL* also shall cease from being a NATION before Me for ever. Thus saith Jehovah: If heaven above can be measured and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all *THE SEED OF ISRAEL* for all that they have done, saith Jehovah. Behold the days come, saith Jehovah, that the CITY shall be built to Jehovah from the tower of Hananeel unto the gate of the corner” (Jer. 31: 31-38).

“For I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you into *YOUR OWN LAND*. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean. From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you. And I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in *THE LAND THAT I GAVE TO YOUR FATHERS*, and ye shall be My people, and I will be your God . . . Thus saith the Lord *GOD*: In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will cause you to dwell in the *CITIES* and the walled places shall be *BUILDED*. And the desolate *LAND* shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of

all that passed by. And they shall say, This *LAND* that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined *CITIES* are become fenced, and are inhabited. Then the nations that are left round about you shall know that I, Jehovah, have builded the ruined places, and planted that which was desolate. I, Jehovah, have spoken it, and will do it. Thus saith the Lord GOD: I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them” (Ezekiel 36: 24-28, 33—37).

“And in the days of those kings [represented by the feet and toes in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream image] shall *THE GOD OF HEAVEN* set up a kingdom which shall not be destroyed, nor shall the sovereignty thereof be left to another people; but it shall *BREAK INTO PIECES AND CONSUME* [no picture of ‘grace’ or the ‘Church’!] all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Dan. 2: 44).

“And I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the *SON OF MAN* came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him *DOMINION*, and glory, and a kingdom, that all *PEOPLES, NATIONS, AND LANGUAGES, SHOULD SERVE HIM*: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Dan. 7: 13, 14).

The above-quoted predictions, taken from the four major prophets, are substantially representative of the various others. Are we not warranted, then, in saying that unless the afflated wording is poetically hyperbolic or rhetorically mystical to the point of being intendedly misleading, the following propositions are sound?

1. These predictions especially refer to the covenant *nation* Israel; not to the New Testament Church.
2. They foretell an actual regathering and national exaltation of that at-present largely scattered covenant people.
3. The wording is such as to make quite obvious that such a regathering and final exaltation has not yet taken place—certainly not in the return

- of the mere “Remnant” with Zerubbabel in 536 B.C., and certainly not in the non-national Christian *Church*, or in the “age of *grace*”.
4. Either there must yet be a fulfilment, or these prophecies are untrue; and if they are untrue then they are not the Word of God.
 5. If these prophecies are true, then (a) they certainly *are* the inspired Word of God, for only God can so fore-disclose the future; and (b) we may expect them to be fulfilled as truly as all those other similarly clear-worded Old Testament prophecies which have already been fulfilled in Israel and in other nations and in the first coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 6. That coming kingdom which they foretell under the reign of the promised Messiah, is the kingdom to which our Lord Jesus referred when He came preaching the “kingdom of heaven” and clearly offering Himself as the Messiah.
 7. That is the kingdom to which the Jewish people of two thousand years ago *understood* our Lord to refer; the kingdom which they *knew* was plainly promised to Israel, and which was to be brought in by the appearing of the Messiah.

Corroborations that this is what was meant by the “kingdom of heaven” appear everywhere. In the very annunciation of our Lord’s coming birth the angel said, “Thou shalt bring forth a Son, and shalt call His name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the *THRONE* of His father *DAVID*; and He shall reign over the *HOUSE OF JACOB* for ever; and of His Kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1: 31-33). It was as “*King* of the Jews” that He was sought after by the Magi from the East (Matt. 2: 2). It was as the acclaimed “*King* of Israel” that He accepted the hosannas of the crowds at His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (John 12: 13). It is as the *King* of Israel that Matthew intends us to see Him, for he says that the triumphal entry fulfilled that part of a Zechariah prophecy which says, “Tell ye the daughter of Zion: Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt, the foal of an ass” (Matt. 21: 4, 5). And it is plain that Jesus Himself *meant* this to be His offer of Himself as Israel’s Messiah-King; for, as all four Gospel writers indicate, He chose the ass and the colt in order to fulfil that prediction. It was for solemnly claiming before Israel’s high priest, that

He was the promised Messiah-*King*, “Son of Man” and “Son of God” that He was condemned to death by the Sanhedrin (Matt. 26: 63, 64; Mark 14: 62; Luke 23: 70). It was as the “*King of the Jews*” that He was crucified, as all four of the Gospel writers tell us.

No less than thirty-two times in Matthew we find our Lord appropriating to Himself that title, “Son of Man”, from the apocalyptic visions of Daniel. As we have seen, in Daniel 7, it is as the “Son of Man” that the Messiah receives authority from the “Ancient of Days” to administer the kingdom. How can we help seeing the clear connection between that and such words of our Lord as those in Matthew 25: 31? —“When the ‘Son of Man’ shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon *the throne* of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all *nations*. . . .” Is there not another loud echo of it in our Lord’s reply to the adjuration of the high priest?—“I am [the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed], and ye shall see the ‘Son of Man’ sitting on the right hand of Power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14: 62).

To *spiritualize* all those representative Old Testament passages which we have quoted, and these various New Testament endorsements of our Lord Jesus as the predicted Messiah-King of Israel as a *nation*, seems to me a strangely loose way of treating inspired Scriptures.

It also creates some very strange contradictions. Those who say that the predicted reign of Christ and the “kingdom of heaven” are purely spiritual thereby make the kingdom preaching of John and our Lord to be the beginning of our “*Christian* dispensation”. Yet John’s baptism was *not* Christian baptism, neither were the early baptizings by our Lord’s own disciples (John 3: 22; 4: 1, 2). Christian baptism could not begin until after the death and burial and resurrection of our Lord (Rom. 6: 3, 4). That is why those “twelve disciples” at Ephesus (Acts 19) who had been baptized “unto John’s baptism” must needs be rebaptized (vv. 3-5).

Moreover, if the “kingdom of heaven” is the Christian dispensation or “age of grace” or the Church, what about our Lord’s words in verses like Matthew 8: 11, 12?—“Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven”. Those three patriarchs certainly do *not* “sit down” in the age of grace, or in the Church which was formed at Pentecost, but they certainly

will in the “kingdom of heaven” when our Lord eventually brings it in with “power and great glory”.

Stranger still, however, are our Lord’s added words in verse 12 (if the kingdom is Christianity or the Church, and those in it are Christian believers), “But the *children* of the kingdom shall be *cast out into outer darkness*: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth”! How on earth (or in heaven!) can true, born-again believers be thus “cast out” into the outer darkness? Does not such language make it clear to all but those who are blinded by wrong theory that the “children”, or intended inheritors of the promised kingdom, were those long-ago Jews who, because of their unrepentant disbelief, were to be excluded?

Or again, if the kingdom of heaven is the Christian dispensation with its “whosoever” Gospel, or if it is the Church, fulfilling our Lord’s command to “go into all the world” and preach the Gospel “to every creature”, how can we possibly harmonize such an interdict as our Lord utters in Matthew 10: 5, “Go *not* into the way of the Gentiles . . . but go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”? Or can we think of present-day Christian missionaries setting sail for overseas service and adopting the procedure laid down in Matthew 10: 11-14? i.e. “And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is *worthy*; and there abide until ye go hence. And when ye come into an house, salute it: and if the house be *worthy* let your peace come upon it; but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, *shake off the dust of your feet [against them]*”! Such incompatible features occur on page after page, if the “kingdom of heaven” is the Christian era or the Church. But if the “kingdom of heaven” was indeed the promised *Messianic* kingdom which was then being offered to the Jews, we can understand at once that the attitude of towns and homes towards the Apostles and their message was an intended *test*. Similarly, the miracles of healing which our Lord empowered the Apostles to perform were not mere showpieces to excite wonder at the supernatural, but, like His own miracles, were *guarantees* of the kingdom offer, and *credentials* of our Lord’s Messiahship.

If it be said that the very title, “kingdom of heaven”, implies a kingdom which is heavenly rather than earthly, and spiritual rather than physical, our reply is that no such implication may be presumed. There are ample reasons

why it is called the “kingdom of heaven” without *any* suggestion that it is only a “spiritual” kingdom. We mention six, as follows:

1. The Messiah-King Himself is from heaven—“the Lord from *heaven*”: see 1 Corinthians 15: 47.
2. It is from *heaven*, i.e. from “the Ancient of Days” (Dan. 7: 13, 14) that He received the kingdom.
3. The kingdom is therefore different from all other kingdoms, which are of earthly origin—“of the earth, earthy.”
4. Other kingdoms are “of the world” (Matt. 4: 8), whereas the Messiah’s kingdom is “*not* of this world” (John. 18: 36).
5. Perhaps most appropriately of all, it is the “kingdom of heaven” because through it, at last, the will of God will be “done on earth as it is *in heaven*.”
6. The expression, “kingdom of heaven”, connects back with the title, “the God of heaven” in the post-Exile books (18 times in Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel; scarcely ever before). It was as “Jehovah, the Lord of all the *earth*”, that God led Israel into Canaan (Joshua 3: 11,13); but after “the glory of the God of Israel” had withdrawn, first from the Holy of Holies, then from the Temple, then from Jerusalem (Ezek. 10: 4, 18, 11: 23), and the apostate nation is driven from the land, there comes this new emphasis, “the God of *heaven*”, as the “times of the Gentiles” begin with Nebuchadnezzar. The key to the meanings of this is in Daniel 4: 26, in the words to Nebuchadnezzar: “*THE HEAVENS DO RULE*”; and in Nebuchadnezzar’s testimony: “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the *KING OF HEAVEN*. . .” Beyond any doubt the new title, “kingdom of heaven”, connects back with all that, and especially to Daniel 2: 44, “The God of heaven shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed.” That indeed, is the promised kingdom to which our Lord’s phrase, the “kingdom of heaven” linked back. The people of old-time Jewry knew it at once. And *that* promised kingdom is *not* a purely “spiritual” kingdom.

When we say, however, that the kingdom of heaven is not a purely spiritual kingdom, we do not overlook that it *is* “spiritual” in the sense that it requires *spirituai-mindedness* in its subjects: uprightness, purity, meekness, peaceableness, love to one’s neighbour; in a word, true

godliness. We recall our Lord's words in Matthew 18: 3, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." The whole Sermon on the Mount, with other great public utterances, voiced the unalterable terms on which the kingdom was now being offered to Israel—terms which were all in accord with Old Testament prediction: a true repentance, a return to true godliness, and a really spiritual-minded keeping of the divine law.

Those who would make the kingdom of heaven solely spiritual sometimes ask: If God foreknew that the Jews would *reject* the kingdom, how could John and our Lord Jesus proclaim it as "at hand"? The answer is twofold. (1) Since the King Himself was actually there, in whom all the promised glories of the kingdom *centred*, it certainly *was* "at hand". (2) It was "at hand" inasmuch as it was being genuinely offered, and could have been then received. As for the divine foreknowing of Israel's rejecting the kingdom, that is a matter for mention anon.

There are various other considerations which we might well mention, all converging on the same conclusion, namely, that by the "kingdom of heaven" John and our Lord meant the Messianic kingdom promised to Israel in the Old Testament; but we forbear, except to emphasize one thing. It is unthinkable that our guileless Lord could have used a term knowing that it would mislead. Yet when He preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand", if He was *not* referring to the kingdom promised in the Hebrew Scriptures and expected by the Jewish people, were they not misled? for that was what thousands *took* Him to mean; and in the "triumphal entry" they *proclaimed* Him the "King" of that promised kingdom (Luke 19: 38, John 12: 13).

One of the surest ways to test an interpretation of Scripture is to see whether it can withstand the strongest arguments of those who differ. I suppose there never was a more vigorous championing of the case for *spiritualizing* the "kingdom" than the late Philip Mauro's book, *The Kingdom of Heaven*. Philip Mauro was a lawyer. If anybody knew how to put a case forcibly he did. Yet if we would the more clearly see how Scripture does *not* really support the idea of a purely *spiritual* "kingdom of heaven", all we need is to scrutinize critically that ably written Mauro treatise.

Summary, Problem, Answer.

So, then, we believe that the real truth of Scripture about the “kingdom of heaven” is as follows:

1. When John the Baptist and our Lord came announcing that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, they meant (and the people so understood) the kingdom promised in Old Testament Scripture to Israel, and through Israel to the nations at large, under the reign of the coming Messiah.

2. The fact that leaders and people were looking for that Scripturally promised kingdom occasioned their immediate and widespread interest as soon as John announced it as “at hand”, which fact also explains why neither John nor our Lord needed to *define* the kingdom.

3. That promised kingdom was to be a real, visible kingdom on earth, with the Messiah as its King, but it was to have spiritual and ethical aspects transcendentally distinguishing it from all other kingdoms; administrative righteousness, justice, equity, and worldwide peace; a regenerated people of Israel with God’s law “written in their hearts”, the knowledge of Jehovah covering the earth “as the waters cover the sea”, and the Holy Spirit “poured out upon all flesh”.

4. That kingdom our Lord came and proclaimed as “at hand,” insisting at the same time on the necessity of *repentance* towards God in order to the actual *coming* of the kingdom. He enunciated the moral and spiritual laws of the kingdom in great verbal manifestos like the Sermon on the Mount. He gave the prophesied credentials of His own Messiahship in the “sign-miracles” which He wrought; and beyond all misunderstanding He offered Himself as the promised King.

What was the result? The people were ready enough to respond to the material aspects of the kingdom, and, if given sufficient incitement, would have fought with desperate nationalistic loyalty to bring it into actuality; but their thinking had become so wedded to the solely Israelitish and physical aspects of the promised Kingdom that they had little if any appetite for its moral and spiritual demands. The kingdom, therefore, in that sense was rejected—first virtually in Galilee (Matt. 11: 20), then officially and nationally at Jerusalem (Matt. 27: 22).

There are those in whose minds this seems to raise a keen-edged question. They ask: Since the kingdom and our Lord were thus rejected, and

since God must have *foreknown* that this would happen, how could our Lord say that the kingdom was “at hand”? Also, inasmuch as our Lord’s rejection and crucifixion were *foretold* in Old Testament Scripture, how could His announcing of the kingdom be genuine? If Jesus knew *beforehand* that the kingdom would be rejected, and that He Himself must be crucified, does not that make His offer of the kingdom deceptively artificial?

It is an inevitable question. Yet is not the problem more seeming than real? Does it not arise mainly through confusing divine foreknowledge with divine predetermining? Because God foreknows and foretells a certain event, that does not necessarily mean that He *predetermined* it. Certainly the Jewish rejection of our Lord Jesus as Messiah-King was foreknown of God; and it was therefore both anticipated and overruled to the fulfilment of God’s larger, all-inclusive purpose running through the ages. But this does not mean that God *fore-ordained* the rejection of the kingdom and of Christ. I say again: *foreknowledge* and *foreordination* must not be confused. To foreknow is simply to know in advance, whereas to fore-ordain or predetermine is to *fore-cause* and *prearrange* so that certain results shall be brought about.

God no more fore-ordained the Jewish rejection and crucifixion of Jesus than He fore-ordained the fall of Satan or the traitorous kiss of Judas, or the sadistic cruelties of the Nazis in the Second World War—for God *cannot* be the author of moral evil. But He permitted the *rejection* of Christ as He has permitted many other foreknown wrong doings and sufferings, because that which He foreknows and permits He anticipates and overrules to the fulfilling of His overall purpose. Let it be grasped once for all, that foreknowing and permitting and overruling are all very different from *fore-ordaining*. In the case of our Lord’s rejection by that old-time Jewry, God did *not* fore-ordain it, but He *did* foreknow it, and anticipate it, and sovereignly overrule it to the expediting of His larger purpose.

Closely allied with this is the further fact that because God *controls* what He permits, and *overrules* what He foreknows, He allows human history to take its normal course, without His continually breaking in to violate the freedom of the human will. If God were always breaking in with interruptions to crush wrong responses of the human will, there would be no real history at all. Comical as it may sound, if God were continually

interrupting to *avert* what He foresees, then it would not be there to foresee at all! Obviously, although the Old Testament foretells various aspects of our Lord's rejection and crucifixion, God could *not* include a plainly worded foretelling that our Lord would come and offer the kingdom and that it would be wickedly rejected in just the way it was, or else our Lord could never have come and made a *bona-fide* offer of the kingdom at all; nor could the Israel nation have been genuinely tested by it. History must needs be allowed to take its own course, without violation of human free will. Yet all is under God's foreknowing and overruling control.

Thus the divinely foreknown and anticipated course of events was allowed to transpire. Our Lord came and offered the kingdom, evoking early response and later repudiation. Then God's prepared overruling and larger purpose began to swing into view—the *Church* of the present dispensation, and this long-extended *age of grace* between our Lord's two advents. Both the Church and this present age were withholden from the foreview of Old Testament prophecy (1 Peter 1: 10). They were parts of "the *mystery* which was kept *secret* since the ages began" (Rom. 16: 25); the "mystery which from the beginning of the ages has been *hid in God*" (Eph. 3: 9); the "mystery which has been hidden from [preceding] ages and generations, but is *now* made manifest" (Col. 1: 16).

The "kingdom of heaven" which was offered and rejected two thousand years ago is *not* on earth today in the form of the Church. The very word, "kingdom" (Greek, *basileia*), is a big inclusive term; whereas the word, "Church" (*ecclesia*), indicates a called out *minority*. Those very words should guard us against confusing the kingdom with the Church. During this present age the twice-rejected kingdom (first in the Gospels; then again in the Acts) is no longer being offered to Israel. This present age is distinctively the age of *grace*, and of God's special purpose in history through the *Church*. The kingdom will come when the King himself returns in the splendour of His second advent. At that time a deeply penitent Israel, with wide-opened eyes, will acclaim the once-crucified Jesus as Messiah-Saviour-Sovereign.

Our Lord Himself clearly indicated that there should be this present long interval of His absence before the bringing in of the kingdom. His parable of the nobleman (Luke 19: 11-27) was expressly spoken to correct those who "thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear."

The “certain nobleman”, having commissioned his servants to look after his interests while he is away, goes into a far country to “receive for himself a kingdom and to return.” But his citizens hate him, and say, “We will not have this man to reign over us”. At some undated time later, he returns in kingdom authority, reckons with his servants, and judges those “enemies” which refused to have him “reign over them.” Could anything be clearer? The kingdom was *not* to come then (i.e. “immediately”) either as the Church or as the Gospel age.

It is unfair to say (as some persistently do) that because we premillennialists recognise this present *suspension* of the kingdom, we thereby make the Cross and the Church a kind of divine afterthought or mere emergency measure to counteract the rejection of the kingdom by the Jews. That is a caricature of which our critics may well be ashamed. The real truth is, that God, who not only foreknows all the reactions of men and nations to the end of time, but has a master-plan covering the whole of human history, has made all things subservient to the supreme revelation of Himself in Christ—as Saviour, King, Judge, “Heir of all things” and everlasting “effulgence” of the divine Being (Heb. 1: 1-3). In His overruling of such tragic human failures as the Jewish rejection of Jesus, God makes even “the wrath of man” to “praise Him” (Ps. 76: 10). The crucifixion of Israel’s Messiah is transformed into the coronation of the world’s Saviour.

The Cross is the *fundamental* purpose. The “kingdom” is an *included* purpose. Among other things, the Cross is fundamental because it concerns human destiny throughout *eternity*, whereas the Messianic “kingdom” concerns human *history* during the ages of *time* only on this earth.

All history is fore-planned, *including* the present suspension of the Messianic kingdom and its yet future realization at the second coming of the now-ascended Lord Jesus. This is confirmed by the fact that although the Church and this present age of grace are nowhere directly predicted in the Old Testament, the Church may now be discerned in the Old Testament again and again, in latent or enigmatic form, in many a remarkable Old Testament *type* or foreshadowing. All is foreknown, and all, either directly or permissively, is part of the overall plan, leading to the intended consummation. Well may we exclaim with the psalmist,

“Thy way is in the sea,

And Thy path is in the great waters;
And Thy footsteps are not perceived”

(Ps. 77: 19).

And we may well add with the wondering apostle,

“How unsearchable are His judgments,
And His ways past finding out!
For of Him, and through Him and to Him
are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen”

(Rom. 11: 33-36).

¹ Hastings’ *Dictionary of the Bible*, article “Kingdom of God”.

WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

SCOFIELD NOTE ON THE “KINGDOM OF GOD”

The kingdom of God is to be distinguished from the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 3: 2, *note*) in five respects: (1) The kingdom of God is universal, including all moral intelligences willingly subject to the will of God, whether angels, the Church, or saints of past or future dispensations (Lk. 13: 28, 29; Heb. 12: 22, 23); while the kingdom of heaven is Messianic, mediatorial, and Davidic, and has for its object the establishment of the kingdom of God in the earth (Mt. 3: 2, *note*; 1 Cor. 15: 24, 25). (2) The kingdom of God is entered only by the new birth (John 3: 3, 5-7); the kingdom of heaven, during this age, is the sphere of a profession which may be real or false (Mt. 13: 3, *note*; 25: 1, 11, 12). (3) Since the kingdom of heaven is the earthly sphere of the universal kingdom of God, the two have almost all things in common. For this reason many parables and other teachings are spoken of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew, and of the kingdom of God in Mark and Luke. It is the omissions which are significant. The parables of the wheat and tares, and of the net (Mt. 13: 24-30, 36-43, 47-50) are not spoken of the kingdom of God. In that kingdom there are neither tares nor bad fish. But the parable of the leaven (Mt. 13: 33) is spoken of the kingdom of God also, for, alas, even the true doctrines of the kingdom are leavened with the errors of which the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Herodians were the representatives (See Mt. 13: 33, *note*). (4) The kingdom of God “comes not with outward show” (Lk. 17: 20), but is chiefly that which is inward and spiritual (Rom. 14: 17); while the kingdom of heaven is organic, and is to be manifested in glory on the earth (See “Kingdom (O.T.),” Zech. 12: 8, *note*; (N.T.), Lk. 1: 31-33; 1 Cor. 15: 24, *note*; Mt. 17: 2, *note*). (5) The kingdom of heaven merges into the kingdom of God when Christ, having “put all enemies under His feet,” “shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father” (1 Cor. 15: 24-28). Cf. Mt. 3: 2, *note*.

WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

IN the New Testament there are three oft-recurring terms, the importance of which soon becomes evident to any thoughtful reader, for the interpreting of them has a decisive effect on our comprehension of the divine purpose in history. Those three are: (1) the “kingdom of heaven”, (2) the “kingdom of God”, (3) the “Church”.

Are those three terms synonymous, and therefore used interchangeably? Or are they different in meaning from each other? In the chapter preceding this, we have reflected on the first of the three, and have shown with some cogency (may we hope?) that the kingdom of heaven and the Church are by no means the same. But are the “kingdom of *heaven*” and the “kingdom of *God*” identical? When our Lord first lifted up His voice in old-time Galilee, His message, according to Matthew, was the “kingdom of *heaven*”, whereas according to Mark and Luke it was the “kingdom of *God*”. Are the two names merely variants for the same reality, or do they denote *two* kingdoms more or less different from each other?

Among dispensationalists there are those who teach that the two are *not* the same—a theory widely disseminated through the earlier edition of the Scofield Bible. In a compact footnote to Matthew 6: 33, the Scofield view is expressed as quoted on the flyleaf to this chapter (which please see).

Yet although the supposed difference between the “kingdom of heaven” and the “kingdom of God” may be thus ably presented, there are big objections, some of which we shall mention. Even if we were to concede (which we do not) that etymologically the title, “kingdom of God” is (as often said) the “larger term” of the two, the mere etymology would prove nothing apart from other evidence. Of the two terms, “America” and the “United States”, the former is the “larger term” in geographical content, yet far more often than not, in common usage, they are used interchangeably. Of the two words, “world” and “earth”, the former is the “larger term”, yet in practical usage the “earth” *is* the “world”, even though a large part of the globe’s surface is not “earth” but water. As for the two titles, “kingdom of

heaven” and “kingdom of God”, the real issue is their *practical usage*. Do they, or do they not, in Scripture usage, refer to the same reality?

It is worth mentioning, first, that there is no place anywhere in our New Testament which *states* a difference between the two. In noting this we are not just resorting to “argument from silence”. On all its major subjects Scripture seems to have some key passage where the essential truth involved is made clear; and ample instances of this could be given; but nowhere is there a solitary verse which either says or implies that the “kingdom of heaven” and the “kingdom of God” are not one and the same.

A second indicative fact is that Matthew alone uses the phrase, “kingdom of heaven”, while Mark and Luke use only “kingdom of God”. If Matthew and Mark and Luke had each used both titles—and especially if they had shown obvious discrimination in their use of the two, we would have had good cause at once for thinking that the two were not the same in meaning. But there is *no* such selective use by the three synoptists. Matthew *only* uses “kingdom of heaven”. Mark and Luke *never* use it. Again and again they report the same words of our Lord as Matthew reports; yet not once, where Matthew reports that our Lord said “kingdom of heaven”, do Mark and Luke alter *their* reporting Him as having said “kingdom of God”. This certainly seems to confirm that the two phrases are simply characteristic of the reporters; and that our Lord used the two interchangeably; and that they are *not* the names of two different kingdoms.

Further, a passage-by-passage comparison of Matthew (who uses “kingdom of heaven”) with Mark and Luke (who use only “kingdom of God”) surely shows that the two terms are used with identical meaning.

<i>Matthew</i>	<i>Mark or Luke</i>
“Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee.” “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent for the kingdom of <i>HEAVEN</i> is at hand” (4: 12, 17).	“Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of <i>GOD</i> , and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of <i>GOD</i> is at hand: repent ye, and believe the Gospel” (Mark 1: 14, 15).
“And I say unto you, that many	“Ye shall see Abraham and Isaac and

shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of *HEAVEN*” (8: 11).

“And when He had called unto Him His twelve disciples He . . . commanded them saying: And as ye go, preach the kingdom of *HEAVEN* is at hand” (10: 1, 7).

“Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of *HEAVEN* is greater than he” (11: 7).

“Unto you [disciples] it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of *HEAVEN*, but unto them [the crowd] it is not given” (13: 11).

“Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of *HEAVEN* is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and

Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of *GOD*. . . . And they shall come from the east and the west . . . and shall sit down in the kingdom of *GOD*” (Luke 13: 28, 29).

“And He went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of *GOD*.” “Then He called His twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. And He sent them to preach the kingdom of *GOD*” (Luke 9: 1, 2).

“For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of *GOD* is greater than he” (Luke 7: 28).

“Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of *GOD*: but to others in parables, that seeing they may not see . . .” (Mark 4: 11; Luke 8: 10).

“And He said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of *GOD*? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all seeds that be in the earth; but when it is sown, it groweth up and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches, so that the fowls

becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof” (13: 31, 32).

“Another parable spake He unto them: The kingdom of *HEAVEN* is like unto leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened” (13: 33).

“Verily I say unto you: Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of *HEAVEN*” (18: 3).

“Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me; for of such is the kingdom of *HEAVEN*” (19: 14).

“Verily I say unto you, a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of *HEAVEN*” (19: 23).

of the air may lodge under the shadow of it” (Mark 4: 30-32; Luke 13: 18, 19).

“And again He said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of *GOD*? It is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened” (Luke 13: 20, 21).

“Verily I say unto you: Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of *GOD* as a little child shall in nowise enter therein” (Luke 18: 17).

“Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of *GOD*” (Mark 10: 14; Luke 18: 16).

“He said. How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of *GOD*!” (Luke 18: 24; Mark 10: 24).

Surely these parallel reportings indicate that neither our Lord nor the Gospel writers thought of the “kingdom of heaven” and the “kingdom of God” as two different kingdoms, nor even as two separable lesser and larger spheres of one kingdom, with the supposedly lesser (“kingdom of *heaven*”) ultimately telescoping into the supposedly larger (“kingdom of *God*”) as taught in the Scofield note. Undoubtedly the inspired Scriptures, especially in their prophetic and apocalyptic parts, often contain latent meanings besides those which lie on the surface; but I believe we do the written Word a bad disservice when we make its most plain-spoken parts yield up recondite deeps and distinctions which are not really there. Not a fleck of a hint do the four Gospel memoirs give that the “kingdom of *heaven*” and the “kingdom of *God*” are anything but one and the same reality. The two

phrases are used in such a direct, *non*-cryptic way, that we simply must accept them *prima facie* as intendedly identical, unless we can be shown cogent evidence to the contrary.

For instance, although Matthew is the only one of the four Gospel narrators who uses “kingdom of *heaven*”, there are five places where he switches to “kingdom of *God*”; and all five show that he uses the two terms *convertibly*, as practical equivalents.

First, take Matthew 19: 23, 24, “Verily I say unto you, a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of *heaven*. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of *God*.”

Second, take the Sermon on the Mount. “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of *heaven*” (5: 3). “Blessed are they that are persecuted for *righteousness*’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of *heaven*” (5: 10). “Except your *righteousness* shall exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of *heaven*” (5: 20). “But seek ye first the kingdom of *God*, and His *righteousness*” (6: 33).

Third, see chapter 11: 12, 18, with 12: 24, 28. “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of *HEAVEN* suffereth violence.” “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a *demon*.” “This fellow doth cast out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons.” “And Jesus said . . . But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of *GOD* is come unto you.” Mark it well: Jesus had been saying that it was the kingdom of *heaven* which had come to them; now He says it is the kingdom of *God*.

Fourth, see chapter 21: 31, “Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of *GOD* before you. For John came unto you [preaching the kingdom of *HEAVEN*: 3: 2] and ye believed him not; but the publicans and harlots believed him.” Could anything make plainer that response to the kingdom of *heaven* and entrance to the kingdom of *God* are the same?

Fifth, see chapter 21: 43, “Therefore I say unto you: The kingdom of *God* shall be taken away from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” That the “kingdom of *God*” is here the same as the “kingdom of *heaven*” is confirmed by the parable which begins five verses later: “The kingdom of *heaven* is like a certain king which made a marriage

for his son”—which was a further rebuke to those who were to have the “kingdom of God” taken away from them.

Surely, instead of our trying to decipher some subtle, esoteric difference between the “kingdom of heaven” and the “kingdom of God”, we are the more definitely meant to see, in this interchangeable use of the two phrases, that they mean the *one*, long-promised, widely expected kingdom of the Messiah.

The Scofield Note

But it is time we glanced back at the Scofield note. It says that, unlike the “kingdom of heaven”, which is “Messianic, mediatorial, and Davidic”,

“The kingdom of God is *universal*, including *all* moral intelligences willingly subject to the will of God, whether angels, the Church, or saints of past or future dispensations.”

Yet, if it is thus *universal*, including all the godly, how could our Lord aver, as He did, that John the Baptist was not in it? “He that is least in the kingdom of *God* is greater than he” (Luke 7: 28).

Again, if the “kingdom of God” includes all the “saints of *past* generations”, as the Scofield note says, how could John and our Lord come preaching, “The kingdom of God is *at hand*” (Mark 1: 15), thereby indicating a kingdom *not* hitherto existing?

Further, if as per the Scofield note, the “kingdom of God” is made up of “all moral intelligences [i.e. *individuals*] willingly subject to the will of God”, how could our Lord say (in Matt. 21: 43) that the “kingdom of God” should be taken away from an impenitent *Israel*, and “given to a *nation* bringing forth the fruits thereof”?

Or, again, if as Scofield propounds, the “kingdom of God” includes past, present, saints, angels, Church, what about all those passages which say that it is still *future*? The passages which we have in mind do not say merely that the earthly *manifestation* of the kingdom is still future, but the kingdom *itself*. Here are two: “When ye see these things come to pass [i.e. not until just before the Lord returns] know ye that the kingdom of *God* is nigh at hand” (Luke 21: 31). “For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit

of the vine *until* the kingdom of *God* shall come” (Luke 22: 8). See also Luke 14: 15 and 19: 11, both of which make the kingdom of God *future*.

Another faulty distinction which the Scofield brief makes is, that “the kingdom of *God* is entered only by the new birth” (John 3: 3, 5-7) whereas the “kingdom of *heaven*, during this age”, is merely “the sphere of a profession which may be real or false”. Yet our Lord’s own word is, “Except ye be *converted*, and become as little children, ye shall *not* enter the kingdom of *heaven*” (Matt. 18: 3).

Still further, if it was the promised *Messianic* kingdom for which the Jews were waiting, and which our Lord announced as the “kingdom of *heaven*”, how comes it that men like Joseph of Arimathaea “waited for the kingdom of *God*” (Mark 15: 43)? Could anything make it clearer that *both* names are used as meaning one and the same kingdom, that is, the Messianic kingdom promised in the Old Testament?

The Kingdom Parables

The Scofield note further says, “Since the kingdom of heaven is the *earthly sphere* of the universal kingdom of God, the two have almost all things in common. For this reason many parables and other teachings are spoken of the kingdom of *heaven* in Matthew, and of the kingdom of *God* in Mark and Luke. It is the *omissions* which are significant. The parables of the wheat and tares, and of the net (Matt. 13: 24-30, 36-43, 47-50) are *not* spoken of the kingdom of *God*. In that kingdom there are neither tares nor bad fish. But the parable of the leaven (Matt. 13: 33) is spoken of the kingdom of God also, for, alas, even the true doctrines of the kingdom are leavened with the errors of which the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Herodians were representatives.”

But is not such argument from omissions fanciful? If those two parables are omitted by Mark and Luke because in the kingdom of *God* there are “neither tares nor bad fish”, why is not the parable of the mustard seed omitted also?—for (according to Scofield) the growth from seed to tree prefigures “rapid but unsubstantial growth”. Yet both Mark and Luke record that of the “kingdom of *God*”!

And how strange to say that although the parables of the tares and bad fish are omitted by Mark and Luke because inapplicable to the “kingdom of

God”, the parable of the “leaven” *is* included because (supposedly) that kingdom is “leavened with errors”! How *can* that be true of the “kingdom of *God*”, since the “leaven of error” leavens “the *whole*”?

The fact is, that those two omissions have no such significance at all. There are no less than *eight* of Matthew’s kingdom parables which are omitted in Mark and Luke: (1) tares, (2) hid treasure, (3) pearl of great price, (4) drag-net, (5) king and servants: 18: 23, (6) labourers in vineyard, (7) ten virgins, (8) servants and talents. Those omissions certainly do *not* signify that the “kingdom of heaven” and the “kingdom of God” are different.

Nor is there any supposed difference between them proved by the further Scofield comment: “The kingdom of *God* ‘comes not with outward show’ (Luke 17: 20) . . . the kingdom of *heaven* is to be manifested in glory on the earth.” Nay, our Lord elsewhere says that the kingdom of God *does* come with outward show: “There shall be signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars. . . . And then shall they see the Son of Man coming with power and *great glory*. . . . When ye see these things, know ye that the kingdom of *GOD* is nigh at hand” (Luke 21: 25, 27, 31). In various passages our Lord says just the same things about the age-end coming of the “kingdom of *God*” as He does about the “kingdom of *heaven*.” His words in Luke 17: 20, that it “comes not with outward show” are simply a corrective to “the *Pharisees*,” meaning that in a spiritual and individual sense it never exhibits itself in religious ostentation such as theirs.

First Corinthians 15: 28

Finally, according to the Scofield note, “The kingdom of *heaven* merges into the kingdom of *God* when Christ, having ‘put all enemies under His feet,’ ‘shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father’ (1 Cor. 15: 24-28).” Yet that Corinthian passage does *not* teach any such merging of a lesser kingdom into a larger. It speaks only of *one* kingdom (i.e. “the kingdom”) which is at last yielded up to the Father, “that God may be all in all.” *That* kingdom is our Lord’s millennial kingdom (as Scofield agrees); and, according to Scripture, its coming to earth at our Lord’s return is just as truly the coming of the “kingdom of *God*” as it is the coming of the “kingdom of *heaven*”—which again confirms that they are identical.

Matthew

“There be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in *HIS* kingdom” (16: 28).

(Then follows the Transfiguration, which forepictures His coming in kingdom glory).

“Then (‘when the Son of Man shall come in *HIS* glory’) the kingdom of *HEAVEN* shall be likened unto. . . .” (25: 1 & 31).

“Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down . . . in the kingdom of *HEAVEN*” (8: 11).

Mark or Luke

“There be some of them that stand here which shall not taste of death till they have seen the kingdom of *GOD* come with power” (Mark 9: 1).

(Then follows the Transfiguration, which forepictures His coming in kingdom glory).

“The Son of Man coming with power and great glory . . . the kingdom of *GOD* is nigh at hand” (Mark 21: 27, 31).

“They shall come from the east and from the west . . . and shall sit down in the kingdom of *GOD*” (Luke 13: 29).

It is equally noticeable how often this future, Messianic kingdom of the *SON* is equally the kingdom of the *FATHER*.

“The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of *HIS* kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity. . . . Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their *FATHER*. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Matt. 13: 41 & 43).

“Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in *HIS* kingdom.” “For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His *FATHER* with His angels” (Matt. 16: 28, 27).

“Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in *THY* kingdom”. . . . “But to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my *FATHER*” (Matt. 20: 21-23).

“When the Son of Man shall come in *HIS* glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of *HIS* glory. . . . Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my *FATHER*, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25: 31-34).

“For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he shall come in *HIS OWN* glory, and in his *FATHER’S*, and of the holy angels” (Luke 9: 26).

As the present age ends in judgment, and the millennial reign of our Lord begins, “great voices in heaven” say, “*THE KINGDOMS OF THIS WORLD ARE BECOME THE KINGDOM OF OUR LORD AND OF HIS CHRIST*” (Rev. 11: 15). It is the one kingdom of the Father and the Son, or, more precisely, of the Father *through* the Son.

Similarly, when (at that same time) the “one hundred and forty-four thousand” of Israel are “sealed” on Mount Zion, they have “*HIS* name [i.e. of God the Son] and the name of His *FATHER* written on their foreheads” (Rev. 14: 1, A.S.V.).

Surely all this clearly tells us that the kingdom of the Son and the kingdom of the Father, the “kingdom of *heaven*” and the “kingdom of *God*” are names or aspects of *ONE KINGDOM*. This is “*the* kingdom” to which Paul refers in 1 Corinthians 15: 24. Therefore, to say that *IT* is the “kingdom of *heaven*” which at last merges into the “kingdom of *God*” is to say that it merges into *itself*.

Exegesis solely on the basis of etymology is always dangerous—particularly so in matters dispensational. To discriminate imaginatively between the two terms, “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God”, simply because of a verbal variation, when our Lord quite evidently used the two interchangeably, is not superior exegetical insight, but delusion; and it adds needless complicatedness to the Biblical revelation. There are many

instances of similar etymological variation. The *Gospel* is called, the “Gospel of Christ”, the “Gospel of God”, the “Gospel of grace”, not to mention other appellations; but it is the one Gospel. The *Holy Spirit* is called, the “Spirit of God”, the “Spirit of life”, the “Paraclete”, the “Spirit of adoption”; but He is the one Holy Spirit. So is it with Israel in the Old Testament, and with the Church in the New. Various names are used, but it is the one Israel and the one Church.

So is it with the “kingdom of heaven” and the “kingdom of God”. The kingdom is one; not two. With that in mind, look back again now at that passage in I Corinthians 15. Observe carefully what it does *not* say, and what it actually *does* say.

It does *not* say that the millennial kingdom becomes merged with the “kingdom of God.” What it *does* say is, that the millennial kingdom shall at last be delivered up by Christ to “the *Father*” (24). In that delivering up of the great millennial kingdom to the Father, we see the voluntary subjection of this whole world to God, through Christ the Representative of the new humanity. That is the transcendent consummation. The kingdom is not delivered to a greater “king”, but to the “the *Father*”; not that the Father only might reign, but “that *GOD* [the triune Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, together] may be all in all.” The one great kingdom of Christ and the Father is the means to this grandest of all consummations: God, not only as all-sovereign King, but something even more profoundly glorious and mysteriously wonderful—“*GOD ALL IN A L L*”.

ADDENDUM ON THE NEW SCOFIELD NOTE

SINCE our writing the foregoing chapter, the new edition of the Scofield Bible is published. We have often paid tribute to the Scofield Bible, and, as the improved new edition now appears, we cannot but congratulate Dr. E. Schuyler English, with his editorial committee, on such a fine achievement, also the Oxford University Press on their attractive styling of it.

I am not altogether surprised that the New Scofield note on Matthew 6: 33 abandons some and modifies much that is in the earlier note, which fact is an admission that a considerable part of the earlier note is error. How many I have met to whom that earlier Scofield note was next to the Word of

God itself in authority! They have been just as sure as the “Note” itself that it was the truth. I wonder what they think now that the new Scofield note retreats from much that the earlier note didactically stated. The new note (which I quote by kind permission) is as follows. Observe its cautious phrasings, “in many cases”, “in some instances”, “at times”, “in some contexts”, which make it as vague at those points as the earlier note was definite.

“The expression, the kingdom of God, although used in many cases as synonymous with the kingdom of heaven, is to be distinguished from it in some instances (see Matt. 3: 2, *note*): (1) The kingdom of God is at times viewed as everlasting and universal, i.e. the rule of the sovereign God over all creatures and things (Ps. 103: 19; Dan. 4: 3). In this sense the kingdom of God includes the kingdom of heaven. (2) The kingdom of God is also used to designate the sphere of salvation entered only by the new birth (John 3: 5-7) in contrast with the kingdom of heaven as the sphere of profession which may be real or false (see Matt. 13: 3, *note*; 25: 1, 11-12). And (3) since the kingdom of heaven is in the earthly sphere of the universal kingdom of God, the two have many things in common and in some contexts the terms are interchangeable.

“Like the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God is realized in the rule of God in the present age and will also be fulfilled in the future millennial kingdom. It continues forever in the eternal state (*cp.* Dan. 4: 3).”

If we may respectfully say so, the central fault in the new Scofield note is, that it blurs the actual expression, “kingdom of God”, as used in the four Gospels, with the universal sovereignty of God often mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. We *all* agree that God is King of the whole universe; but that is not the point at issue. The one question is: Do the actual terms, “kingdom of *heaven*” and “kingdom of *God*,” as used by our Lord in the four Gospels, mean the same thing? I believe we have shown that they *do*. Both expressions mean the Messianic kingdom predicted through the Old Testament prophets and expectantly waited for by the covenant nation.

Therefore, in our judgment, the new Scofield note is as wrong as the earlier one when it says: (1) that “the kingdom of God *includes* the kingdom of heaven”; (2) that “the kingdom of heaven” is the “sphere of a profession which may be real or false”; (3) that as *two* kingdoms they are “*realized* in the rule of God in the present *age*”; (4) that the “kingdom of God”, as distinct from the kingdom of heaven, will “continue for ever in the *eternal* state”. Our own conviction is, that at the *end* of the Millennium and the transition from it to the “eternal state”, our Lord’s *Messianic* kingdom will merge into that boundless, timeless, endless reign in which *THE TRIUNE GOD IS “ALL IN ALL”* (1 Cor. 15: 28).

WHAT IS THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH?

There are some who make much ado about the fact that our English word, “church”, is not a true translation of the Greek word *ecclesia*. Let it be at once admitted that our word, “church,” comes to us through the Teutonic races as “kirche” and “kirk” from the Greek *kuriakos* (i.e. belonging to a lord or master) which occurs in 1 Cor. 11: 20 and Rev. 1: 10. But the mere etymology of our word, “church”, is irrelevant for the following reason. Whether we translate the Greek word, *ecclesia*, by “church” or “assembly” or any other English word, the vital concern is: What does the Greek original itself mean? and how is *it* used in the New Testament? When once we know *that*, our English word, “church”, will serve quite well to carry the very same content in our own language.

J.S.B.

WHAT IS THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH?

THE Church of Christ—what is it? We find a strange variety of ideas about it today, from the loose notions of the vulgar crowd up to the elaborate concepts of the sacerdotalist and the keen distinctions of the hyper-dispensationalist. To many it is little more than an old-fashioned, diversified, ethical and moralist institution. Many others think of it as the sum of all the well-known religious denominations in Christendom, or as the whole number of persons connected with them. To most Roman Catholics it still means exclusively the ecclesiastical system of which the Pope is the head. Some of the new heterodox sects, like the Jehovah's Witnesses, are quite sure that they alone are the true Church.

The famous Westminster Confession of 1646 comprehends the Church as “all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children”. Article 19 of the Church of England describes a church as “a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same”. (With neither definition could we ourselves agree.)

There are those who maintain that the Church began at Pentecost and is comprised exclusively of Christian believers from then to the end of the present age. There are others who insist that the true Church *cannot* be limited to this one age; it consists of all the godly in every era, including all the saints of the Old Testament centuries—the “whole multitude of the redeemed”.

It needs only a moment's reflection to tell us how important to the Christian faith is a truly Scriptural view of the Church. Unless we rightly perceive the true *nature* of the Church, we cannot properly understand either its *message* or its intended *ministry*; we cannot take either the right *attitude* to it or render the right kind of *service* to it; we cannot have either the fullest conception of *salvation* or relate ourselves in a truly Scriptural way to the loud, present-day accent on *ecumenicity*.

If we would know the real Church we must look beyond the Church itself to the Holy Scriptures. Utterly fallacious is the common Romanist postulate that the Church gave us the Scriptures, therefore that which gave is greater than that which is given. Both the Scriptures and the true Church (as distinct from any humanly organized body) are the creation of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, there can never be any contradiction between them; and any “church” (including Rome) which in doctrine or practice contradicts the Scriptures, thereby contradicts the Holy Spirit.

Some New Testament Data

Turning to the New Testament (King James Version) we find the word, “church”, 80 times, and the plural, “churches”, 35 times. In every case it represents the Greek word, *ecclesia*, except in Acts 19: 37, where “robbers of churches” should be “robbers of *temples*”. How, then, does the New Testament use that word, *ecclesia*?

First, the term in itself does not have any intrinsic religious or Christian meaning. It signifies simply any assembly, whether occasioned by impulse or convened by summons, in any circumstances either of order or disorder, and for any purpose, social, civic, or religious.

That this is so may be seen in Acts 19, where the crowd which shouted itself hoarse for two hours against Paul in the great theatre at Ephesus is called an *ecclesia*. Verse 31 says, “Some therefore cried one thing, and some another, for the *ecclesia* was confused.” The word occurs again as the town clerk rebukes the mob, “If ye enquire anything . . . it shall be determined in a regular *ecclesia*” (39). “And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the *ecclesia*” (41).

To translate *ecclesia* by our word, “church”, in those verses of Acts 19 would certainly give a strange idea of the Church; which fact should caution us that in certain other passages, also, our word, “church” may be unallowable. For instance, in Acts 7: 38, Stephen refers to the Israel tribes after their Exodus from Egypt as “the *ecclesia* in the wilderness”. Because our standard versions have translated the word as “church” in that verse, it has been supposed by some to prove that the Church of Christ reaches backwards and embraces the Israel nation of old, or at least the godly in it. Acts 7: 38 should read, “the assembly [or out-gathering] in the wilderness”.

The Old Testament Israel must never be confounded with the New Testament Church. The former was national, physical, temporal. The latter is catholic, spiritual, time-transcending.

I am convinced that in the early chapters of the Acts *ecclesia* should not have been translated as “church”, for the word did not then have the deeper meaning which it acquires in the Epistles, where the “*mystery*” of the Church is unfolded. In those early chapters of the Acts a truer translation would be “assembly” or “assemblies”, for the gatherings of those first Judean believers were not conceived of as being any *more* than assemblies.

However, in all but a very few instances, *ecclesia* is used throughout the New Testament with a clearly Christian reference; and its occurrences may easily be classified.

First, it is used in a *local* sense, meaning groups of Christian believers regularly meeting, in this place or that, for worship, fellowship, the ministry of the Word, the breaking of bread, mutual testimony, and the furtherance of the Gospel.

“Then had the assemblies rest throughout all Judea and Galilee.”—Acts 9: 31.

“The assembly that was at Antioch.”—Acts 13: 1.

“The assembly which is at Cenchrea.”—Romans 16: 1.

“John, to the seven assemblies which are in Asia.” Revelation 1: 4.

Second, the word is used in a *social* sense, meaning the meeting itself, as distinct from locality and from the individuals who comprise it.

“What? have ye not houses to eat and drink in? or despise ye the assembly of God?”—1 Corinthians 11: 22.

“In the assembly, I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might teach others. . . .” 1 Corinthians 14: 19.

“God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the assemblies.”—1 Corinthians 14: 33.

“Neither doth he himself receive the brethren, but forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the assembly.”—3 John 10.

Third, *ecclesia* is used in a *collective* way, covering Christian believers considered objectively as a group or fraternity. Acts 8: 3 says that Saul “made havoc of the assembly”; but an “assembly” *as such* cannot be persecuted, for it has no independent consciousness of its own. It was the individual *members* of the assembly whom Paul oppressed—“entering into every house, and, haling men and women, committed them to prison.” The “assembly” was the aggregate of those individuals.

“And great fear came upon all the assembly” (i.e. upon the *individuals* who collectively comprised it; for an assembly, as such, cannot experience fear).—Acts 5: 11.

“Take heed . . . to all the *flock* . . . to feed the *assembly* of God” (i.e. feed the individual believers whom the term covers collectively).—Acts 20: 28.

“If therefore the whole assembly come together” (i.e. the total of the individuals who collectively *are* the assembly). —1 Corinthians 14: 23.

“And at that time there was great persecution against the assembly . . . and *they* (i.e. the individual believers who collectively composed it) were all scattered abroad.”—Acts 8:1.

Fourth, *ecclesia* is used in a *corporate* sense, meaning all Christian assemblies and believers everywhere, regarded as one organic whole. Inasmuch as they all confess “one Lord, one faith, one baptism”, they “being many are one body”, having a visible and distinct existence in human society.

“Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the *Ecclesia* of God.”—1 Corinthians 10: 32.

“And God hath set some in the *Ecclesia* [not merely in any one local assembly, but in the Church as a whole] first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers. . . .”—1 Corinthians 12: 28.

“That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the *Ecclesia* of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”—1 Timothy 3: 15.

The *Ecclesia*, in this corporate sense, is the so-called “Church visible”, of which history takes account as such; though, alas, since sub-Apostolic days, it has existed in a variety of denominations and divisions based upon differences of doctrine or forms of administration.

Fifth and finally, the word is used in a profoundly *spiritual* sense. Christian believers are not only a widespread, supranational fellowship held together by their one “precious faith” (2 Peter 1: 1). Through a spiritual rebirth inwrought by the Holy Spirit they are all *vitally* one in the same spiritual life; for they are all “in the one Spirit” (Eph. 2: 18), and the one Spirit “dwells in” all of *them* (Rom. 8: 9, Eph. 2: 22). Moreover, by this spiritual regeneration they are brought into a sacredly exquisite and eternally indissoluble union with the very Son of God Himself. He is the Head, and they are His mystic *body* (Eph. 1: 23). He is the Bridegroom, and they are His mystic *bride* (Eph. 5: 25—27, 32). He is the Foundation, and they are the mystic *temple* built thereon (Eph. 2: 20—22).

“Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word; that He might present it to Himself [i.e. as a bride] not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.”—Ephesians 5: 25—27.

Another wonder-evoking picture of this earth-transcending, time-outlasting, *spiritual* Church is given in Hebrews 12.

“But ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the *heavenly* Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the universal gathering, and the *CHURCH OF THE FIRSTBORN* which are written in heaven . . .”—Hebrews 12: 22, 23.

The true Church of Christ.

It is captivating thus to see how the Scripture usage of *ecclesia* develops from its merely local and social meanings in the early Acts, on through its collective and corporate meanings in the Pauline epistles, until it reaches its sublime heights and depths of *spiritual* meaning in Ephesians and

Colossians. Thus, also, we come to know what the Church of Christ is, in its truest and profoundest meaning.

In these days, with the new ecumenicity movement pushing for large denominational mergers, it is accentuatedly important that we keep before our minds this New Testament revelation of the true, *spiritual* Church. Either for good or ill, there certainly may be reunion of *denominations*; but, strictly speaking, there *cannot* be a reunion of the true Church, for that which has never been divided can never be reunited. With the deepest conceivable depth of truth it may be said that the spiritual Church of Christ is *indivisible*.

That Church is the one “body” of which Christ is the “Head.” There cannot be two such. It comprises all the elect of God in Christ, “chosen in Him before the foundation of the world.” Every born-again Christian believer is a member in it; and its full membership consists entirely of such, to the absolute exclusion of all others, whether religious officials, popes, cardinals, bishops, priests, ministers, missionaries, preachers, or other professors of the Christian creed. Its members may be scattered throughout more or less diverse denominations; but they are all one in basic New Testament doctrine, one in the experience of a regenerating union with Christ, one in their faith and hope and love toward Him, one in their adoring esteem of Him as the supreme standard of holy character and behaviour.

Building of God, mysterious, fair,
Church of our Lord, beyond compare;
Fashioned of souls from many lands,
Temple divine, not made with hands.

One Church of Christ, above, below,
One master-plan the parts all show.
One wondrous whole of God’s elect,
One great omniscient Architect.

One Church amid all churches here,
Wherein all reborn souls cohere;
Movements and groups unite, divide;
This Church is *one* whate’er betide.

As the former Anglican bishop, J. C. Ryle says, “The existence of this Church does not depend on forms, ceremonies, cathedrals, churches, chapels, pulpits, fonts, vestments, organs, endowments, money, kings, governments, magistrates, or any act or favour whatsoever from the hand of man. It has often been driven into the wilderness, or into dens and caves of the earth, by those who ought to have been its friends. Its existence depends on nothing, fundamentally, but the presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit; and this, being ever within it, the Church cannot die.”

“This is the flock of Christ; the household of the faith; the temple of the Holy Spirit. This is the Church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven. This is the royal priesthood, the chosen generation, the peculiar people, the purchased possession, the habitation of God. This is the universal Church of the Apostles’ Creed, and of the Nicene Creed. This is that Church to which the Lord Jesus promises that ‘the gates of hades shall not prevail against it’, and to which He says, ‘Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age,’ ” (Matt. 16: 18 & 28: 20).

This, we may add, is the one Christian Church which is truly *catholic*. It is the monopoly of none, and the equal possession of each. It belongs to no one group more than to any other, and inheres in no one form of administration more than in another. It is not the property of any one nation or race. Its wonderful door of entrance, through the atoning blood of Christ and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, swings wide open on the great hinge of “whosoever will, let him come.”

It recognizes no difference of value between Jew and Gentile, white or coloured, rich or poor, learned or illiterate; but utterly without any such distinction its members are “all one in Christ Jesus.” The same redemption-price as was paid for John and Paul and Peter was paid for that Negro lad from yonder Congo village. Speaking many different languages of the tongue, they all speak one language of the heart. As soon as they really get to know each other, they *know* that they are all truly and equally one in a spiritual catholicity and family oneness deeper than any merely natural consanguinity.

This Church, truly catholic in its inclusiveness, and Apostolic in its faith, is that which does the real work of Christ on earth. “Its members may be a little flock, and few in number, compared with the children of the world; one or two here, and two or three there, a few in this parish, and a

few in that. Yet these are they who shake the universe, who change the fortunes of kingdoms by their prayers. These are they who are the active workers for spreading the knowledge of pure religion and undefiled.”

“This is the Church which shall be truly glorious at the end. When all earthly glory is passed away, then shall this Church be presented without spot before God the Father’s throne. Thrones, principalities and powers upon earth shall come to nothing. Dignities, and offices, and endowments, shall all pass away. But the Church of the firstborn shall shine as the stars at the last, and be presented with joy before the Father’s throne, in the day of Christ’s appearing. When the Lord’s jewels are made up, and the manifestation of the sons of God takes place, Episcopacy, and Presbyterianism, and Congregationalism, will not be mentioned. One Church only will be named, and that is the Church of the elect.”

Lighten, O Lord, our inward eyes,
This one, true Church to recognise;
Not glamorous unions men design
But inward life and fire divine.

Soon shall the temple finished be,
And wondering worlds its glory see;
Angels and spheres shall all adore
Christ in His Church for evermore.

This Church links the divine purpose from eternity past to eternity future, through the present ages of time. See again Ephesians 5: 25-27.

1. “Christ loved the Church”

—that is a mystery of eternity.

2. “And gave Himself for it”

—that is a verity of history.

3. “To sanctify it, having cleansed it”

—that is a purpose in the present.

4. “That He might present it to Himself”

—that is a finale of the future.

Well may we wonder at this mystery of our Lord's pre-mundane love for the Church. But amid the grand progress of the divine purpose through the ages, observe especially the present emphasis on corporate and individual *sanctity*.

“To sanctify it [the Church], having cleansed it by the washing of water by the Word.”

The Church corporate and historical is made up of Christian individuals. There can be no sanctified Church without sanctified individual believers. Never yet has the whole Church been on earth. Only a fraction of it is on earth today. Millions of its members have already passed through and beyond earthly scenes into the paradise above. Millions of its elect members are yet unborn, or are yet unconverted. But there is always *some* part of the Ecclesia on earth. This, then, is our Lord's purpose and desire: As the historical Church, in its successive generations, passes through this transitional earth-phase to its heavenly translation, every individual member of it is meant to be not only regenerated by the “washing of the Word”, but *sanctified* by an inward holiness inwrought by the Holy Spirit.

“Christ *loved* the Church.” Perhaps even the most spiritually minded among us have not yet suspected how *tender* is the divine-human love of the Lord Jesus for those who comprise His mystic bride. What, then, is it that His tender-hearted love for us most desires? It is our present *sanctification* through complete yieldedness to Him, and by the infilling of the heavenly Spirit. Oh, that in our glad, full, continuous yieldedness and sanctification He may “see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied”! (Isa. 53: 11).

The Bride of Christ

Furthermore, while we are glancing back at Ephesians 5: 25-27, it is opportune to re-emphasize that the Church is indeed our Lord's “*bride*”. There is a regrettable fondness in some quarters for hyper-dispensational dividings which are “distinctions without difference”. Some of those dear

brethren who keep hammering away on the necessity of “rightly dividing the Word of truth” (2 Tim. 2: 15) rather prove to be adepts in *over*-dividing it! For instance, I have a pamphlet now before me which says,

“We emphatically state that the Church is not once in the New Testament called the *bride* of Christ. Those who teach this error as truth tell us that the Church is the *body* of Christ. How then can the Church be the *bride*? If such interpretation is true, we are to understand according to ordinary reasoning that the bridegroom would be married to his own *body*, which is absolutely absurd. Further, if the Church is the *bride* of Christ, those who support this error are faced with another unreasonable conclusion, namely, that Jehovah would have two wives. He has already pledged His word that He will remarry His divorced wife, Israel (Hosea 2: 19, 20, 23). In Revelation 19, 20, 21, John tells us who the ‘bride’ is.”

We purposely leave the author of the pamphlet anonymous, so that our reply may be frank without carrying any personal reflection. We will excuse his brash over-confidence that the rest of us “teach this error as truth”, but the abrasive insinuation of our supposedly implying that “Jehovah has two wives” is a raucous repugnance which deserves blunt rebuke. Does our unnamed author seriously believe that Jehovah, the uncreated Creator of the universe, is a husband to Israel in anything more than a merely metaphorical way? When will our hyper-dispensational echoers of E. W. Bullinger have enough exegetical balance to know that obvious *metaphors* were never meant to be taken literally? When we read, again and again, about the “right hand” and all-seeing “eyes” of the Almighty, do we attribute to Him hands and eyes like those of the human body? Not at all: we realize that a purely spirit-being does not have physical parts. Similarly when God likens His covenant relationship with Israel to that of a husband, are we to literalize what is obviously only a metaphorical way of expressing it? If so, what about those passages where God is said to be the *Father* of Israel (Is. 63: 16), and where He calls Israel “My *son*” (Hos. 11: 1)? We might well ask our unnamed hyper-dispensationalist friend, “Did Jehovah marry His own child?”

As for his innuendo that if the Church is both the “body” and the “bride” our Lord “would be married to His own body, which is absolutely absurd”, the absurdity is with himself for literalising into ungainly contradiction two beautiful *metaphors* which, wonderful as is their meaning, are still, nevertheless, *only* metaphors. Even hyper-dispensationalists agree that our Lord is the one foundation, the “chief cornerstone”, on which the Church is built as a beautiful “temple” (Eph. 2: 20-22). So we may well ask them: If the Church cannot be both a “body” and a “bride”, how can it be both a “*building*” and a “body”? Can we not all see that those three metaphors, (1) Head and body, (2) Bridegroom and bride, (3) Foundation and building, are meant to express *together* the sacred wonder of a *living* and a *loving* and a *lasting* union between our Lord and His own?

As for the strange remark, “The Church is not once in the New Testament called the *bride* of Christ,” we are surprised that anyone can *miss* seeing it described as such in a passage like Ephesians 5: 25-33.

“*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it. . . . So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies . . . even as the Lord the Church.*”

This is immediately followed by a reference to Genesis 2: 22-24, which tells us that Eve, who was actually taken from Adam’s *body*, became also his *wife*. Adam himself called her, “Bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh”—which became the basis of the first wedlock. Referring directly to this, Paul continues, in Ephesians 5: 30,

“For *we* are members of *His* body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this cause [as Genesis 2: 24 says] shall a man ‘leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh’. This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning *CHRIST AND THE CHURCH.*”

Could anything be plainer? The Scofield note is just as true as it is concise: “Verses 30, 31 [in Eph. 5] are quoted from Gen. 2: 23, 24, and exclude the interpretation that the reference is to the Church merely as the body of Christ. Eve, taken from Adam’s body, was truly ‘bone of his bones,

and flesh of his flesh’, but she was also his *wife*, united to him in a relation which makes of ‘twain . . . one flesh’.” Yes, the true Church is indeed the bride! In keeping with this Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11: 2, “I have espoused you to one *Husband*, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to *Christ*.”

The Long-hidden Mystery

This Church, the true Church, in which there is “neither Jew nor Gentile, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female,” but all are “one in Christ Jesus,”—this Church is the ‘*mystery*’ kept secret during the pre-Christian ages of history. How anyone can fail to see a clear statement of this in Ephesians 3: 3-6 is a puzzle to some of us. Paul says:

“By revelation He [God] made known unto me the mystery . . . which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ. . . .”

It was no “mystery” that salvation was to come through Christ to the Gentiles (see Rom. 9: 24-26, 30, and 15: 9-13). That which was not hitherto divulged was the divine purpose to blend both Jew and Gentile, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, into the one spiritual organism. When our amillennialist brethren make Ephesians 3: 5 mean merely that “the mystery was not made known in other ages” *to the same degree* “as it is now revealed”, they are inserting an artificial delimitation upon it, and refusing the even more definite wording of verses 9 and 10: “The mystery which has been *hidden from all ages, in God* . . . in order that *NOW* there might be made known through *THE CHURCH* the manifold wisdom of God.” Even more inviolately the same complete hiddenness from the pre-Christian era is expressed in Romans 16: 25 and Colossians 1: 26, 27.

Going with this, it is observable that although our Lord’s atoning death is foretold again and again in the Old Testament, never is there any foretelling of His *resurrection*. Admittedly, in the light of our New Testament we may now discern Old Testament *adumbrations* of it (in

Elisha, Jonah, Psalm 16: 8-11, etc.) but it is nowhere actually foretold. Similarly, our Lord's still-future reign on earth in global empire is glowingly described in advance; but His ascension to heaven as Son of Man with "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28: 18), and His present priestly-kingly ministry there, and the present age of grace—*all* of that was withheld from Old Testament foreview (1 Peter 1:10-12). *Why?* I believe a main reason was that Lucifer, Diabolos, Satan, should not know of it. If Satan had suspected that the crucified Christ would rise from the dead, bringing to light the hitherto-hidden "mystery" of the *Ecclesia*, and opening up an "age of grace" in which millions of human beings would be eternally saved—if Satan had guessed all that, then the archfiend, instead of hounding our Lord to the Cross through human dupes, would have expended all his wiles and powers to prevent His ever going there. Thus it was, that throughout the pre-Christian centuries, the Church remained the undivulged "mystery" hid in God.

But now, since the beginning of this Church age, the secret is out!—and it will be given public consummation at the second coming of Christ, when the present age closes. At that time the true Church—one living whole in heaven and on earth—shall be *completed*. The Lord Himself shall "descend with a shout". All the millions of true Christian believers who have passed through death into heaven will return with Him, suddenly finding themselves "clothed upon" by their resurrection bodies; and believers then still living on earth will be "changed", "caught up" and raptured with all those Christians of former days to "meet the Lord in the air"! We must reject all theories of a "*partial* rapture". Our Lord is not coming to raise and transfigure only a part of His people to share that glory and enter His kingdom. *All* who are truly washed in His precious blood and born of the regenerating Spirit shall be included. As 1 Corinthians 15: 51 says, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall *ALL* be changed. . . ."

During the millennial kingdom-age which then follows, there will be millions of human beings on earth who will gratefully "believe" on our Lord Jesus for salvation, as they live under the righteous reign of the divine-human King who was once crucified as the Saviour of sinners; and they, too, will be eternally saved; but they will *not* be members of the *Ecclesia*. No; the Church which is the "mystery"—the mystic "body" and "bride" and "temple" of Christ, is completed at the *Rapture*. In John 20: 29

our Lord says to Thomas, “Because thou hast *seen* Me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have *not* seen, and yet have believed.” The saved of the millennial age will be those who *see* and believe; but the all-transcending benediction is upon those of the *present* age who have “*not* seen and yet have believed”. They, and they only, will be the glorified *Ecclesia*. Into all that, however, with its other kindred aspects of fascinating interest, we cannot enter here. Let all of us who know the cleansing of the “precious blood” and the “renewing of the Holy Spirit” be daily living in the “blessed hope” of the Bridegroom’s ever-nearing return.

Oh, the transcendent privilege of being a blood-bought, Spirit-quicken member in that true Church! Let the all-eclipsing excellency of such an unspeakable honour break for ever the spell of all merely earthly or fleshly enchantments! May we never envy the perishing worldling in his shortlived glamour! Neither let us be deceived by sacerdotal concepts of the Church, or by a false ecumenicity which regards the Church as a visible institution rather than (as in truth it is) a *spiritual organism*.

Within Thy Book, O God all-wise,
A wondrous truth we find;
We read it there with eager eyes
And ever grateful mind;
When Jews of old the Saviour slew,
When seemed Thy plan outdone,
Thy larger purpose swept in view—
The *CHURCH* of Thy dear Son.

Elect and blood-bought mystic *bride*
Of Thine eternal Son;
Begotten from His wounded side;
By Calvary’s anguish won:
His mystic *body*—He the Head;
A *building*—He the Base;
Each member by His life is fed,
Each stone upheld in place.

Oh, living, lasting, loving bond—
His body, temple, bride!

Oh, price all estimate beyond—
That Cross all crimson dyed!
O God, who calledst me to share
This union all divine,
May all my life and ways declare
How truly I am Thine.

COLLECTIVE GRASP OF THE GOSPELS

Let mental culture go on advancing; let the natural sciences progress in ever greater extent and depth; let the human mind widen itself as much as it desires; yet beyond the elevation and moral culture of Christianity, as it shines forth in the four Gospels, it will not go.

Goethe.

The great bulk of the opposition to the virgin birth comes from those who do not recognise a supernatural element in Christ's life at all. . . . It is not, with these writers, a question of the virgin birth alone . . . but a question of *all* miracles.

James Orr.

The miracle of the *Person* carries with it, by the sheer force of the law of congruity, every other miracle.

Edwin Lewis.

COLLECTIVE GRASP OF THE GOSPELS

OUR New Testament begins with four pamphlets commonly known as the four Gospels. Those four, although in a literary sense little more than pen-sketches, are the most extraordinary memoirs ever written. Their writers were not scholars, but a tax-collector, a copyist, a physician, and a fisherman; yet with unaffected simplicity they have written immortal literature.

The incomparableness of those four memoirs arises from three features: (1) the *Person* they present, (2) the *purpose* they disclose, (3) the *pattern* they assume. It is those three features which explain why there are *four* “Gospels” instead of just one.

As for the wonderful *Person* whom they present, He is Israel’s Messiah and the race’s Saviour. As Messiah of Israel He is both Sovereign and Servant. As Saviour of the race He is both sinless Man and God the Son. Corresponding with those four aspects are the four characteristic emphases: (1) in Matthew, the Sovereign, (2) in Mark, the Servant, (3) in Luke, ideal Man, (4) in John, incarnate God.

As for the all-eclipsing *purpose* which the four Gospels disclose, it is to exhibit Jesus as Saviour in a fourfold way. In Matthew, above all else, He is the authentic Fulfiller of Old Testament promise; so Matthew’s recurrent phrase is, “That it might be fulfilled” (38 times).¹ In Mark He is notably the mighty Worker, the Executive of the divine will; so the recurrent word is, “straightway,” or “immediately” (42 times). In Luke, with unmistakable emphasis, He is in the widest sense human, with a genealogy not just Jewish, Davidic, Abrahamic, as in Matthew, but connected right back to Adam. With more detail than elsewhere, He is the babe of Mary, the boy of Nazareth, a real part of the human story: so Luke’s recurrent clause is, “Now it came to pass” (40 times). In John, distinctively, He is the Word become flesh, the infallible Revealer of God; so the recurrent idiom is, “Verily, verily” (24 times).

As for the *pattern* which the four Gospels assume, it is the most exquisite fourfold plurality in unity conceivable. Although each of them bears the obvious marks of independence, the four blend in such a mutually complementive unity as only divine superintendence could have effected. In keeping with their fourfold presentation of Jesus as King (in Matthew), Servant (in Mark), Son of Man (in Luke), Son of God (in John), we find that Matthew at the outset concerns himself with the Davidic *genealogy*; Mark starts at once with the public *ministry*; Luke lingers over the *nativity*; John begins with our Lord's *pre-existence*.

What is true about the way each of the four Gospels *begins* is equally true all the way through, right on to the way in which each of the four *ends*. Matthew ends with our Lord's resurrection. Mark goes further, and ends with His ascension. Luke goes still further, and ends with the promise of the enduing Spirit. John goes even further, and ends with our Lord's promise of His second coming. How appropriate that Matthew, the Gospel of the mighty Messiah-King, should end with the mighty act of His resurrection! How perfectly fitting that Mark, the Gospel of Jehovah's lowly Servant, should end with the lowly One exalted to the place of supreme honour! How beautifully in keeping that Luke, the Gospel of the Spirit-anointed Manhood, should end with His promise of the soon-coming Spirit to endue His disciples! How fitting a completion that John, the Gospel of the divine Son, written with special thought for the Church, should end with the risen Lord's own promise of His return!

Matthew puts the emphasis on what Jesus *said*; Mark on what Jesus *did*; Luke on what Jesus *felt*; John on who Jesus *was*.

Matthew says, in effect, "The promised One is here—see His *credentials*." Mark says, in effect, "This is how He worked—see His *power*." Luke says, in effect, "This is what He was like—see His *nature*." John says, in effect, "This is who He really was—see His *deity*."

Matthew was a Jew. Mark was part Jew and part Gentile, as his two names, John and Markos, indicate. Luke was altogether Gentile, as his name, Lucas, shows. John transcends all racial distinctions, writing as senior elder of the early Christian brotherhood. Corresponding with these differentials, Matthew presents our Lord primarily for the Jew; Mark for the Jew-Gentile; Luke for the Gentile; John for the Church.

Matthew presents our Lord's sayings and doings in impressionist *groupings*. Mark gives them in rapidly successive *snapshots*. Luke weaves them into a beautifully unfolding *story*. John gives us a complete *interpretation*. Each employs the method best suited to his own aspective emphasis in the overall presentation of Jesus, as King, Servant, Man, God. Not only in a general way, but down to the most fascinating details, the four penmen so select and arrange their data as to accentuate those four aspects individually, while yet collectively they blend into the one composite, indivisible unity. ¹

These characteristic differences between the four Gospels can easily be overstated. They are differences only in emphasis and degree, not in essence or substance. They need not be overstated, yet neither should they be overlooked, for they are really there. None of the four has a monopoly of *any* aspect, yet each of the four has immortalized *one* aspect; and the more we examine their respective variations in that light, the more fascinating they become.

Yes, the four aspects are really there, explaining why there are four "Gospels" instead of only one, and why each of the four has its own distinctive peculiarities. Therefore, we need to recognise this if we would have a truly strategic grasp of the four Gospels, especially in dealing with different types of thinkers, or in answering some who see only a part of the Saviour's full splendour.

PIVOTAL TURNING-POINTS

But there is another way in which we ought to see those four Gospels. To a discerning eye, certain significant *turning-points* are observable in them. These can easily be missed, yet once they are clearly seen they can never be forgotten, and they greatly influence our apprehension of the total message. We here point them out as they occur in Matthew, and then in the four Gospels side by side.

The Gospel according to Matthew.

As presented by Matthew, there are four decisive turning-points in our Lord's message and ministry. Unless we perceive them we miss much of the dispensational meaning in our Lord's words and acts. The first occurs in chapter 4: 17,

“From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Note the time-mark: “*From that time.*” It connects back to verse 12: “Now when Jesus had heard that *John was cast into prison*, He departed into Galilee.” The forerunner had heralded the nearness of the long-promised kingdom; and now, as the herald is removed, the King himself appears and proclaims the imminence of the kingdom.

The choice to begin in *Galilee* was a deliberate one. The hostility in Jerusalem, which had now incarcerated John, made our Lord's Galilean detour a necessary strategy; though the ultimate objective was Jerusalem.

But the outstanding feature, of course, is the *subject* of our Lord's preaching. “From that time Jesus began to preach . . . the *kingdom of heaven* is at hand.” As we have earlier shown, that kingdom was the Scripturally predicted Messianic kingdom for which the Jewish people were eagerly looking. The earlier chapters of Matthew are wholly occupied with the announcing and expounding of that Messianic kingdom by our Lord and His selected messengers. First we have the transcendent moral laws and spiritual principles of the kingdom enunciated in the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5 to 7). Next we find a succession of miracles, or “mighty works”, through which our Lord exhibits His Messianic credentials (8 to 10). Next we are told the main reactions by leaders and people.

“This generation” (11: 16-19)

Galilean cities (11: 20-30)

The Pharisees (12: 2, 10, 14, 38)

The multitudes (13: 1-52)

The Nazarethites (13: 53-58).

In other words, Matthew tells us, first, what Jesus *taught*; then what Jesus *wrought*; then what people *thought*; which is just the order in which any enquirer would want to know about Him.

Quite clearly, by the time we reach chapters 11 and 12 and 13, we are meant to understand that the kingdom has, in effect, been rejected. Who can miss seeing that in the parables of chapter 13 our Lord was summing up the results of His preaching thus far? Only a very small number among the multitudes were “good ground” hearers. His tragic verdict on the crowd as a whole is seen in verses 13 to 15, “This people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed . . .” With its lofty ethics and spiritual ideals, the offered kingdom did not win the enthusiastic welcome of a people whose degenerate hearts and carnalized expectations and bigoted nationalism were mainly set on a coming kingdom of material splendour. Despite the impressiveness and popularity of the healing miracles, the kingdom itself was rejected, first *morally* in Galilee, then, later, civically and *nationally* at the capital.

The New Turning-point

Going with that Galilean rejection of the kingdom we find a new time-mark followed by a new emphasis. In chapter 11: 20 we read, “*THEN* began He to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not.” And again, in verse 25, “*AT THAT TIME* Jesus said: I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes . . . neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.”

Immediately following this, there is an abrupt change of emphasis in our Lord’s message. Up to this point it has been altogether the *kingdom*, but now the emphasis shifts to the *person* of our Lord Himself, and His offer of Himself as the answer to the need of the *individual*. Thus, in verses 28 to 30,

“Come unto *ME*, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you [a yoke is for two only] and learn of *ME*; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find *REST UNTO YOUR SOULS*. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”

Mark it well, this boundless-hearted invitation is not only a great Gospel text for preachers, it is the second and deeply significant pivotal point in our Lord's ministry. Let me underscore it: Until now the subject has been solely the kingdom, but now the emphasis shifts to the *PERSON—Jesus Himself*, as Teacher, Friend, and Saviour of the individual.

We are not alone in seeing this dividing-point. The Scofield note on our Lord's gracious new invitation aptly says: "The rejected King now turns from the rejecting *nation* and offers, not the kingdom, but *rest* and *service* to such in the nation as are conscious of need." A new *note* is struck: "Come unto *ME*"; and a new *appeal* is made—the appeal for personal discipleship: "Take My *yoke* upon you."

To realize this gives new intelligence to the chapters immediately following. The new emphasis is unmistakable. In chapter 12: 1—14 we have the personal lordship of Jesus over the *Sabbath*, centring in His declaration, "For the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath day." Next, in verses 15 to 21, the personal *character* of Jesus is photographed for us in the quotation from Isaiah:

"Behold my Servant, whom I have chosen; My Beloved in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my Spirit upon Him, and He shall show judgment to the Gentiles.¹ He shall not strive nor cry; neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall He not break, and a smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory. And in His name shall the Gentiles hope."

Next, in verses 28 and 29, the personal *power* of Jesus is emphasized in His being the Stronger than the strong, who binds Satan. Then, with a further rebuke to the religious rejectors of the kingdom (28-42), the section closes with our Lord's declaring of the new personal *relationship* between Himself and His disciples: "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

Observe, also, that in association with these new accents on the *person* of our Lord, three times He Himself makes claim to striking personal superiority:

“In this place is One greater than the Temple” 12: 6.

“Behold, a greater than Jonas is here” 12: 41.

“Behold, a greater than Solomon is here” 12: 42.

After this comes chapter 13, practically the whole of which is devoted to the seven parables expressing the “*mysteries* [i.e. hitherto hidden truths] of the kingdom” (verse 11), the main design of which is to disclose, though in partly veiled form (10-14) the *postponement* of the kingdom, as a result of Israel’s present imperviousness. The parables of the hidden mustard seed, the hidden leaven, the hidden treasure, all indicate the present abeyance of the Messianic kingdom, during the absence of the King; while the parable of the tares, and that of the dragnet, plainly indicate that its coming will be “at the end of the age” (note “*Then*” in verse 43, with 39-42 and 49). Thus, the kingdom unaccepted becomes the kingdom suspended. An even greater purpose of God is being revealed, in view of which all the emphasis is now upon the person of Christ Himself.

This section in which the *person* of our Lord is prominent reaches a striking climax in chapter 16. Already, after seeing Him walk the waves and tread down the tempest, the disciples have “worshipped Him” and exclaimed, “Of a truth Thou art God’s Son!” (14: 33). But now, as the Galilean itinerary nears its end, our Lord directly asks them, “Who do men say that I the Son of Man am?” (16: 13). The very question contains the claim that He *is* “the Son of Man” (a term which to Jewish minds implied Divinity: Lk. 22: 69, 70. John 3: 13). When the disciples had replied, our Lord further asked, “But who say ye that I am?” It has been well observed that this was “a momentous enquiry on which hung the foundation of the Christian Church.” It was vital that the disciples should be right, not only as to His Messianic office, but as to His *person*.

Peter’s reply spoke for all twelve though it clothed itself with Peter’s own characteristically vivid feeling: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” The reply confessed not only our Lord’s Messiahship and mission, but also the divinity of His nature and person. The disciples were expressing something too big and mysterious to grasp, yet too evident and unmistakable to doubt.

This double affirmation of His Messiahship and Deity was the vital response for which our Lord had waited; and He who was truly human as

well as absolutely Divine was undisguisedly affected by the impressive avowal. His profoundly significant response was—

“Blessed art thou, Simon, son of Jonas; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter (*Petros*—a stone or piece of rock) and upon this Rock (*Petra*—the great rock, the now-confessed divine Christ Himself, not Peter!) I will build my *CHURCH*; and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it.”

Thus, with this avowal of His divine Sonship by the disciples, comes the *first mention of the CHURCH*; and this marks the third pivotal point in our Lord’s ministry. First it is the *KINGDOM*. Next it is the *PERSON*. Now it is the *CHURCH*. Get those three well in mind—

First emphasis

and movement—THE KINGDOM (from chapter 4: 17)

Second emphasis

and movement—THE PERSON (from chapter 11: 28)

Third emphasis

and movement—THE CHURCH (from chapter 16: 17)

Having mentioned the Church, our Lord immediately speaks of its relation to the Kingdom. He says, “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (19). Roman Catholic theologians have naively misappropriated those words, claiming that in them our Lord gave to Peter the keys of the *Church*: but the verse teaches no such thing. The “keys” are those of “the kingdom of heaven” not of the Church; and, as the symbol of *entry* into the still-future kingdom, they are here committed, through our Lord’s words, to the *Church* for the duration of this present age in which the kingdom is held over, pending the second advent of the King.

During this present age, entry into the kingdom is through spiritual membership in the true Church, effected by a new birth: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” The refusal of the kingdom by the Jews of old was a strange failure which lay concealed in the fore-knowledge of God. Locked up in the secret counsels of the Godhead there lay, not only the rejection of the kingdom, but the present long period of its

suspension, the world-wide preaching of the Cross, and the out-calling of the Church. It was therefore ordained that during this present extended interval, participation in the eventual kingdom should be through the Church.

The Accompanying Time-Mark

Too striking to miss, a new time-mark accompanies this first mention of the Church. See verse 21:

“*FROM THAT TIME* Jesus began to show unto His disciples how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, *and be killed*, and be raised again the third day.”

“*From that time . . .*” Yes, it is too striking to miss. With the confession of His deity comes the first mention of the *CHURCH*; and with the first mention of the Church comes the first direct mention of the *CROSS*! (“Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it”—Eph. 5: 25). Our Lord had no need to die for the *kingdom*; that is His by Davidic right; but the *Church* is His by Calvary blood-purchase. Even before this our Lord had made two or three indistinct allusions to His coming death, but they were no more than that; whereas from now onwards the references are explicit. Mark 9: 31 uses the imperfect tense suggesting *repeated* references.

Each of these pivotal events in Matthew’s narrative has a clear time-mark, and is followed by a new shift of emphasis. After this first mention of the *Church* and the *Cross* in chapter 16: 13-21, it is observable how the new note recurs in chapters 17 and 18, with which our Lord’s Galilean ministry ends.

Chapter 17 begins with the Transfiguration. All three synoptists emphasize its connection with our Lord’s first mention of His yet future *return* to earth “in the glory of His Father, with His angels” (Matt. 16: 27-17: 1, Mk. 8: 38-9: 2, Lk. 9: 26-28). Plainly we are meant to see in the Transfiguration a pictorial anticipation of the coming “kingdom” (16: 28) and the connection of the Church with it (our Lord, the glorious King;

Moses and Elijah representing Israel; and the three disciples representing Christian believers of the present dispensation).

In the same chapter there is another reference to the Cross and the Resurrection (22, 23). Then, in chapter 18, there is the parable of the lost sheep, depicting our Lord's *saviourhood*, and prefaced with the words, "The Son of Man is come to save that which was lost" (11-14). Next comes further reference to the *Church* (15-20). If a trespassing brother remains intransigent, the aggrieved party is to "tell it to the church" (*ecclesia*), and any "binding" or "loosing" in the matter is at the decision of the local church, because of the precious, vital promise now given—

"For wherever two or three are gathered together in my Name,
THERE AM I IN THE MIDST OF THEM" (18: 20).

The Climactic Emphasis

Following these anticipations of the future Church, the Galilean detour ends. Chapter 19 marks a major break. "When Jesus had finished these sayings, He departed from Galilee, and *came into the borders of Judea.*" Here begins the trek to Jerusalem, to the tragic climax of the Cross, and the complete message following the resurrection victory.

The Cross and its meaning now loom large. That Cross is the main *purpose* in view (20: 17-19, 23). Here is the biggest thing of all—*salvation* for men through propitiation.

"The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a *ransom* for many" (20: 28).

"This is the blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the *remission of sins*" (26: 28).

In these later chapters of Matthew we see how the "kingdom of heaven", already *virtually* rejected among the intractable cities of Galilee, becomes *actually* rejected, civically and representatively at the capital city of the nation. Moreover, the rejecting nation also becomes itself rejected, especially through its leaders (21: 19, 31, 32, 43-45, 23: 13-33, 39). The parables in these closing chapters re-emphasize that the "kingdom" is postponed—the householder (21: 33-36), the marriage feast (22: 1-14), the

ten virgins (25: 1-13), the talents (25: 14-30), also the judgment of the sheep and the goats (25: 31-46). The great thing now is that the crucified King of Israel becomes the risen Saviour of the race.

The Final Emphasis

So, on the Easter side of Calvary, Matthew strikes his final chord: *the Gospel for the whole world!*

“All power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth. Go ye, therefore, and disciple *ALL NATIONS*, baptizing them into the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And, lo, *I AM* with you all the days, even *UNTO THE COMPLETION OF THE AGE*.”

Those, then, are the four movements in Matthew’s account of our Lord’s ministry. Clearly marked for all who are minded to see, they reveal the on-moving of the profound divine purpose through and beyond the foreknown and overruled unbelief of Israel, issuing in the supreme message published to all nations—*salvation* through the crucified but risen Lord Jesus! See the four movements in sharp distinction—

1. *THE KINGDOM* (from chapter 4: 17) Offered by the King Himself exclusively to the nation Israel.
2. *THE PERSON* (from chapter 11: 28) The “Meek and Lowly”: invitation to individual discipleship.
3. *THE CHURCH* (from chapter 16: 17) With the first mention of which comes the first mention of the Cross.
4. *THE GOSPEL* (chapter 28: 16-20) Salvation for all men through the crucified but now risen Saviour.

It only remains to add that this clearly demarcated development in Matthew’s record has a parallel in the fourfold outward movement which may be seen in the four Gospels collectively.

Matthew plainly adapts his narrative primarily to the *Jews*. His first concern is to connect the person and message and crucifixion of Jesus with

Hebrew Scripture and the Messianic hope. Hence his opening Davidic genealogy, and his distinguishing refrain, “That it might be fulfilled,”

In Mark and Luke, however (lest Matthew’s account should seem to suggest that the Gospel is a development merely *in* and not *from* the Jewish faith), our Lord is noticeably disengaged from those strictly Jewish aspects which Matthew has been intent to underscore. In Mark there is no Davidic genealogy. Only twice (against twelve occurrences in Matthew) do we find “that it might be fulfilled”. Our Lord appears, not so much as fulfilling the past as commanding the *present*—with irresistible power over both visible and invisible realms. It is the Gospel of *action*, and its first-intended approach seems to be to the Roman rather than the Hebrew. It was perfectly adapted to such Roman converts as those described in Acts 10, and may aptly be summarized in Peter’s words to them: “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all those who were oppressed of the devil.”

Yet although Mark moves away from the studied Jewish adaptations of Matthew, it is Luke who, in the widest sense, presents our Lord as the “Son of *Man*”. In that third Gospel the door swings wide open: there is broadest human sympathy, catholicity of outreach, and a Saviour so presented as to engage the Gentile mind at large. The very preface prepares us for this; for while the other three Gospel penmen, according to Hebrew form, begin without a dedication, Luke not only prefixes a dedication in Greek fashion and classic style, but dedicates his memoir to a Gentile dignitary.

With John, the outward movement is completed. Whereas Matthew’s story begins with, “Where is He that is born King of the *Jews*?” John begins right away with, “Behold the Lamb of God, which beareth away the sin of the *world*.” And whereas, in Matthew, our Lord’s first instruction to His outgoing evangelists was, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles,” the first great broadcast in John is, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that *WHOSOEVER* believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

Thus, while Matthew concentrates on the *Jewish*, John publicises the *racial*. While Mark photographs *action*, John discloses *meanings*. While Luke portrays the “Son of Man” with outreaching human *sympathy*, John exhibits the “Son of God” communicating *regeneration*.

Jewish versus Racial

The crux of this outward expansion from the Jewish to the racial may be seen in John 12: 20-24.

“There were certain *Greeks* among them that came up to worship at the feast. The same came therefore to Philip which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying: Sir, we [Greeks] would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew; and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus.”

Our Lord did not send a direct reply to those enquiring Greeks. Instead, He soliloquised in the hearing of His disciples,

“The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you: Except a seed of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. . . . And I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw *all men* unto Me.”

Note the supreme time-mark here: “*The hour is come.*” Observe, also, that it is the Son of Man “lifted up” on the Cross who is to “draw *all men*”.

What, then, is the meaning of that soliloquy for those enquiring Greeks? The circumstances explain. Although the “kingdom of heaven” had already been virtually refused, its actual rejection by the nation was now to receive *official* expression at Calvary. But, by the sovereign grace of God, that tragic climax of Jewish guilt was to become the means of providing salvation for the whole world. Coming at the very hour when Jewish unbelief was swiftly rising to its height, and when the sadness of His rejection must have been weighing heavily on our Lord, the enquiry of those “certain Greeks” was a sudden, gleaming reminder that beyond the confines of tiny Judea was a whole world, stretching out yearning hands for a *Saviour*.

Yet while Christ was offering Himself exclusively to the Jews as their Messiah-King He had no message of salvation for those Greeks and the rest of the great outside world. The King of the Jews must be crucified before He could be the Saviour of the world. The “seed of wheat” must die before

there could be the world-wide harvest. The Gospel of the Kingdom must become enlarged into the Gospel of the “grace of God which bringeth salvation to all men”. *Then* would Christ have a message for the Greeks and the great world of which they were but a part. Therein, also, is the explanation of our Lord’s exclamation, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw *all* men unto Me.” He does not mean all men without *exception*, but all men without *distinction*, whether Jews or Greeks or of any other nationality. The Christ of the Cross is no longer a Christ offering Himself exclusively to the Jews. Calvary obliterates all national distinctions.

Such, then, in brief, is the fourfold movement observable in those four immortal memoirs from the pens of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John.

1. THE KING AND THE KINGDOM
2. THE MASTER AND THE DISCIPLE
3. THE CHURCH AND THE CROSS
4. THE GOSPEL AND THE WORLD

“Blessed are your eyes, for they see [said Jesus], and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you: Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them” (Matt. 13: 16, 17). “I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight” (Matt. 11: 25, 26).

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¹ Along with “As it was spoken (or written)”.

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¹ For a full treatment of this see vol. 5 in our series, *Explore the Book*.

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¹ This outreaching mention of the Gentiles, also, is of concurrent significance. Hitherto the proclamation was limited by our Lord Himself to Israel (10: 5, 6).

A RE-SURVEY OF THE ACTS

PART ONE

NOTE

If it should be wondered why we devote three chapters to the Acts of the Apostles, against only one to the four Gospels, the following factors explain the disparity, (1) We are persuaded that the Book of the Acts, in its *dispensational* bearing, is one of the most misunderstood documents of Holy Scripture. (2) To exhibit amply the features which *determine* its dispensational significance requires a careful traversing of its two main parts—which takes extra pages here. (3) We give this extra space because the dispensational meaning of the Acts has a decisive bearing upon certain erroneous ideas which are rife in these days concerning the Church, Pentecost, speaking in tongues, bodily healings, and other gifts of the Spirit.

J.S.B.

A RE-SURVEY OF THE ACTS

BEYOND any question, this record known as the “Acts of the Apostles” is one of the most momentous episodes in the Bible drama of God and man. From a dispensational point of view no other historical juncture can be more commanding—unless our perspective is strangely out of focus. It marks the transition from the message of the “kingdom” in the four Gospels to the mystery of the “Church” in the Pauline epistles. It records the greatest adventure of all time. It describes, in fact, one of the most fateful turning-points in history. To understand it rightly is of corresponding importance. Yet (to my own thinking, at least) it is a seriously misunderstood part of the Bible, and calls for earnest reconsideration.

As to the dispensational meaning and bearings of the Acts, our three studies here will lead us to conclusions which are quite out of keeping with generally accepted ideas; for which reason we ask patient and unhurried thought as we here review again the leading features and pointers in the familiar record.

Since this document, the Acts, is not a doctrinal treatise, but a record, the significance of *events* is here of prime interest. If we re-study the narrative, keeping that well in mind, we soon come to a simple but decisive discovery. There are *three pivotal events* recorded, which, when duly appreciated, invest the three main movements with emphatic meaning, and give the book as a whole its far-reaching dispensational significance. As a prelude to our reexamination of these, let us briefly scan the book again in its totality, making ourselves clear as to its scope and key and plan.

The Scope of the Book

By the scope of a book or passage we mean its bounds as determined by the subject dealt with and the main end in view. In the historical records of the Old Testament, for instance, the controlling thought and aim have clearly determined what should be included and what omitted. After the

Flood, Old Testament history is almost exclusively devoted to the nation Israel. That is because the Bible, having for its controlling purpose the unfolding of the divine plan of redemption, is principally concerned with the nation through which the divine purpose was being specially developed. Great world-empires like Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Persia, are referred to only in incidental ways, and in certain prophetic chapters largely occupied with foretelling their ruin.

Voltaire saw easy proof in this that the Bible could not be inspired. “Why, just think of those great empires,” he said, “how gladly we could afford to be in ignorance of this little tribe, for the sake of knowing more about the great civilization of Egypt and the splendid empire of Persia!” But in Dr. A. T. Pierson’s words, “One little village, one ruined inn, one despised stable, one manger which has long ago rotted into dust, is more precious in God’s eyes than all Babylon and Nineveh and Thebes.”

Scripture history is never merely history for its own sake. It is subservient to one controlling purpose. That explains why great empires are ignored, why certain periods are silently passed over, why many matters of science and art and philosophy find no mention. The limits are governed by the requirements of subject and aim.

What is true of the Old Testament is true of the New. It is true of the Gospels (John 20: 30). It is true of the book which we are now reconsidering. The scope determines the contents. The subject and aim together decide what must be included and what excluded. Therefore, what *is* included is of underlined significance as revealing special purpose.

The Key to the Book

By the “key” to a book or passage we mean the dominant aspect or idea in the treatment of the subject which explains why the writer uses his material in a particular way. For instance, two men write on a certain period of Church history, both possessing the same data; but the dominant thought with one of them is the Church’s overcoming of external opposition, whereas with the other the dominant thought is the Church’s internal development doctrinally. Although the two treatises may have much the same scope, the dominant thought in each case affects the writer’s selection, arrangement, and presentation of material.

Sometimes the “key” to a book of Scripture is a *verse*, sometimes a *word*, sometimes a recurrent *idea*, like the melodic nucleus in one of Bach’s fugues, around which the whole artistry is developed. Here, in the Acts, there is a key *verse*. It is chapter 1: 8, “Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto Me, both in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

In that verse, also, the *geographical* development of the whole record is anticipated; for in chapters 2 to 7 the witness is borne in Jerusalem. In chapters 8 to 12 it is extended throughout Judaea and Samaria. Finally, from chapter 13 onward, it is carried to the “uttermost part of the earth”.

The Two Main Movements

This story of the Acts is in two parts, the first part running to the end of chapter 12, the second part from chapter 13 to the end. In the first part Jerusalem is the centre. In the second part Antioch is the centre. In the first part Peter is the prominent figure. In the second part Paul is the prominent figure. In the first part there is a reaching-out movement from Jerusalem, through Judaea to Samaria. In the second part there is a reaching-out movement from Antioch, through the empire, to Rome. In the first part we are restricted to Palestine, where witness is borne first to the Jews of the homeland and then to Jews and Gentiles alike. In the second part we are conducted through the empire, where again witness is borne first to the Jews of the Dispersion, and then to Jews and Gentiles alike. The first part ends with the general rejection of the Word by the Jews of the homeland. The second part ends with the general rejection of the Word by the Jews of the Dispersion. The first part ends with the imprisonment of Peter. The second part ends with the imprisonment of Paul.

The Nature of the Witness

But the critical question is: What was the *nature* of the Apostolic witness to Christ? for in the answer to that question lies the supreme significance of the record. A first pointer comes right away in chapter 1: 3, “He showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs,

being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to *the kingdom of God*." So, during those forty days between His resurrection and His ascension, the uppermost subject was "*the kingdom of God*". Naturally enough, this caused the disciples to enquire, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (verse 6).

Yes, that enquiry by the Apostles was natural, intelligent, pertinent; yet very few writers on the Acts will admit it. Most expositors charge the Apostles with spiritual obtusity and bigoted nationalism for asking if the "kingdom" would soon be restored to "*Israel*", when (as it is said) their minds should have been on the world-wide Gospel of divine *grace*.

Yet is that usual way of regarding the Apostles' question true to background and context? Surely not. Here are grown men of normal common sense; they have companied with Jesus some three years, continually observing and hearing Him in public and in private. They have heard all His teaching about the "kingdom", with additional explanations away from the crowd; and although not having grasped all the far-reaching significance contained in some of our Lord's utterances, have nevertheless intelligently comprehended the gist of His teaching (Matt. 13: 51).

And now, these specially chosen and tutored men have had those forty days of culminating tuition from the lips of the *risen* Christ, specially pertaining to "the Kingdom of God"; at which time, as Luke tells us, "*then* opened He their understanding, that they might know the Scriptures". Yet in spite of all this, we are expected to believe that when the disciples asked, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" they were so completely without understanding that they had taken teaching about a *spiritual* kingdom (the Church) to mean a material and outward kingdom, and had therefore misconstrued the plain teaching of Christ, not merely upon a minor matter, but upon the central and most vital subject of all His teaching! Surely that is preposterous.

With such a common misjudging of the Apostles' question in Acts 1: 6, it is not surprising that our Lord is supposed to have rebuked them when He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power." Yet far from its being a rebuke, their being kept uninformed is explained by our Lord's earlier word, "Of that day knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark 13: 32). Then *why* is there such misunderstanding of the

Apostles' question and our Lord's reply? It is because the "kingdom" is commonly confused with the *Church*, as in the following quotation.

"Not to rule over cities; not to speculate on the designs of the Father and the destiny of the Jews; but to go into the whole world, and tell every creature the story of Christ, was to be their princely work. To found a kingdom, not over men's persons, but 'within' their *souls* [i.e. a *spiritual* kingdom, in the form of the Christian Church], a kingdom not of provinces, but of 'righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit', a kingdom to be spread, not by the arms of a second Joshua, but by the 'witness' of the human voice; a kingdom, the power of which would not lie in force or policy or signs observed in heaven, but in a *spiritual* power imparted by the Holy Spirit."

Yes, *that* is why expositors castigate the Apostles for the supposed irrelevancy of their question. They confuse the Messianic kingdom, the "kingdom of heaven", or "kingdom of God", with a so-called *spiritual* kingdom which in reality is practically identical with the *Church*.

What, then, was it that the Apostles were commissioned to preach by the risen Christ? Clearly (as we have noted) it was something to do with "the kingdom of God", for that was the uppermost subject of consideration during those forty days. But what do Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us?

Take Mark first. According to him the Lord's word was: "Go ye into all the world, and preach *the Gospel* (Mark 16: 15). Now in our own day that word, "Gospel" has become such a commonplace of Christendom that it is used as being in itself a title, without any such qualifying phrases as "the gospel *of the kingdom*" or "the gospel *of the grace of God*". It has come to have a fixed, evangelical meaning, namely, the offer of personal salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But what did the word mean on the lips of the risen Lord when He said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel"? We can only know by observing how the Lord Himself used the word. It comes five times in Matthew and six in Mark.

Its first occurrence in Matthew is chapter 4: 23, "And Jesus went about all Galilee . . . preaching the gospel of *the kingdom*." Next, chapter 9: 35, "And Jesus went about all the cities and villages . . . preaching the gospel of

the kingdom.” Next, chapter 11: 5, “The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed . . . and the poor have the *gospel* preached unto them.” If it should be asked *which* gospel was preached to the poor, the context settles it beyond doubt (compare 10: 5, 11: i, 11: 12). Next, chapter 24: 14, “And this gospel of the *kingdom* shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations.” Finally we have chapter 26: 13, “Verily, I say unto you: Wheresoever *this gospel* [i.e. of the kingdom] shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.”

Here are the occurrences of the word in Mark. First, in chapter 1: i, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” If it should be asked: What *is* this gospel of Jesus Christ? the very next occurrence of the word (verse 14) answers: “Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the *kingdom of God.*” Next, verse 15 gives our Lord’s message as, “The time is fulfilled, and the *kingdom of God* is at hand, repent ye and believe *the gospel.*” So there can be no misunderstanding as to what is meant by the “gospel” in *those* verses! Next comes chapter 13: 10, “And the gospel must first be published among all nations.” The meaning here is fixed by the parallel verse in Matthew, already cited. So is it with the next occurrence of the word in 14: 9. It can mean one thing only—the gospel of the *kingdom*. This brings us to the last occurrence of the word in Mark, chapter 16: 15, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the *gospel* to every creature.” Patently, therefore, the “gospel” here in our risen Lord’s commission to His apostles, is (or at least includes) the message of “*the kingdom.*”

Yes, that “Gospel of the *kingdom*” plainly inheres in the risen Master’s mandate to the Twelve. Only now, since the Cross, there is a measurelessly meaningful new content added which makes it a *doubly* wonderful “Gospel”. According to Mark the charge was,

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be *SAVED.* . . .”

Although the actual word, “Gospel”, is not used in Luke’s aspect of the final commission, the great new development in its meaning is uttered:—

“And He said unto them: Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and *REMISSION OF SINS* should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are *WITNESSES* of these things.”

That final paragraph in Luke hooks right on to his opening paragraph in the Acts, where he tells us that the subject of the risen Lord’s converse with the Apostles was “*the kingdom of God*” (1: 3), accompanied by the promise that the Holy Spirit should endue them as His “witnesses”.

Clearly, therefore, the “Gospel” which those first witnesses were to proclaim was twofold. They were to witness to our Lord as (1) Messiah-King of Israel; the crucified but now risen Deliverer of His people; the predestined King of the long-promised “kingdom of heaven”; (2) the personal Saviour who, through His atoning death and resurrection, saves all who accept Him from the guilt and power and eternal penalty of sin.

They were to present again to Israel the offer of the King and the kingdom just as our Lord had done up to the time of His crucifixion, only now there was that all-eclipsing new content in the message—the Cross as the divinely provided atonement for “the sin of the world”, and the mighty news of individual salvation through faith on the Lord Jesus, the royal Christ of Israel, and now the risen Saviour of the world.

Once this *dual* content of the early Apostolic testimony is recognized, we are ready to grasp the *first* far-reaching significance of the Acts. That never-to-be-forgotten “day of Pentecost” described in Acts 2 is generally assumed to mark the historic inauguration of the Christian *Church*. But does it? The true answer will presently emerge of its own accord if we consult the records open-mindedly. One thing which soon stands out so firmly that one wonders how any reader could miss seeing it, is this:

*THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES IS PRIMARILY A RENEWED
OFFER OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN TO THE NATION
ISRAEL.*

I emphasize that word, “primarily”. The Acts is not *only* a renewed offer of the kingdom to Israel, but it is so *primarily*. John the Baptist had announced the kingdom as “at hand”, and had heralded the imminent

advent of Israel's Messiah-King. Then our Lord Himself had come upon the scene, had announced the kingdom as indeed "at hand", had enunciated the moral and spiritual principles of the kingdom, had displayed the credentials of His Messiahship, and had called for repentance as the necessary prelude to the incoming of the kingdom. But the kingdom was rejected, and the King was put to death.

On the Cross, however, the crucified King's first word is, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*" This comes as a surprise, for the impression which one gets from the four Gospels is that the Jewish leaders knew well enough what they were doing. The cruel taunts which they flung at the Saviour when He was on the Cross were an unwitting admission that they had understood our Lord's claims all too clearly, even though professing otherwise. Their own words condemn them. They now admit their understanding that Jesus had offered Himself as *Israel's King*, else how explain their cry, "If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the Cross, and we will believe on Him"? They evidently understood Him to have claimed to be *the Messiah*, else how explain their words, "Let Him save Himself, if He be the Christ, the chosen of God"? They clearly knew that He had claimed to be uniquely *the Son of God*, else how explain their words, "He trusted in God, let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him, for He said: I am the Son of God"? They knew full well that He had exhibited the *credentials* of Messiahship in the cures which He had wrought, else why their admission, "He saved others . . ."? Yes, Israel's leaders knew that they were crucifying One who in plain terms had offered Himself as their Messiah-King. This is put beyond any doubt by their appeal to Pilate to alter the title over the Cross—"Write not, The King of the Jews; but that *He said*, I am the King of the Jews" (John 19: 21).

Yet there would also be some among Israel's leaders, along with those in their thousands among the mass of the people, of whom it would be true, "They know not what they do." Such, for instance, among the leaders, was Saul, the future Paul. "I obtained mercy," he says, "because I did it ignorantly" (1 Tim. 1: 13).

Mark well, then, the dying Saviour's words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." It goes without saying, that those words express most marvellous love. Our Lord cannot lay hold on anything of a *positive* nature which might recommend the impenitent nation to the mercy

of God; but in quenchless compassion He seizes on this one extenuating factor, even though it be only of a negative sort—"They know not what they do."

But, besides displaying the wonderful love of Jesus, these words become a momentous factor in the Divine dealing with the nation. Can it be said with any measure of truth that the Jewish nation perpetrated that supreme wrong *in ignorance*?—then the stroke of divine retribution upon the nation is for the time being stayed! The righteous Judge will not inflict penalty, either on man or nation, where guilt is not publicly and fully proved. The Jewish nation must be given an extended opportunity to accept the King and the kingdom which it has so tragically repudiated; and the renewed opportunity must be of such a character that any further refusal on the ground of ignorance will be out of question.

Behold the patience of God! In answer to that plea, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," judgment is postponed, and a further period granted for repentance. This further period is that of the thirty-some years covered by the Acts of the Apostles, when the Holy Spirit was outpoured in Pentecostal fulness, and with such supernatural signs as the Jews had been demanding before they would believe. Hence we find that a renewed offer of the kingdom is now made to Israel through the lips of the Spirit-filled Apostles, the specially commissioned witnesses of the rejected and crucified, but now risen and ascended Messiah. This is the key to all the recorded proclamations of the Apostles to Israel at and after Pentecost. They are uttering this renewed offer of the kingdom to their nation, though now, also, with the accompanying message of personal salvation through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Calvary.

This message, in the very nature of the case, is "*to the Jew first*", and then "*also to the Gentile*". We see this order observed in both parts of the book. In part one (1-12), the message is "*to the Jew first*" at Jerusalem. Then, following its official rejection there, it is carried throughout the land as the message which is "*also to the Gentile*", and we see a kind of Gentile Pentecost in the remarkable descent of the Holy Spirit upon the assembly in the house of Cornelius. In part two (13-28), we have the missionary tours of Paul, who, although he later becomes distinctively "*the apostle to the Gentiles*", goes without exception "*to the Jew first*" in every city, and only

“turns to the Gentiles” when the message is refused by his own “kinsmen according to the flesh”.

This renewed offer of the kingdom to Israel, we repeat, is the *key* to all the recorded proclamations of the Apostles to the nation at and after Pentecost. Glance at the first two public utterances of Peter—the one on the day of Pentecost, the other later, in the Temple porch.

The first is given in chapter 2: 14-40. It is addressed specifically to the men of Israel (14, 22, 36). Next (note carefully), the Pentecost effusion is said to be in fulfilment of Joel 2: 28-32. Peter says: “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel” (16). What then does the prophecy in Joel refer to? Does it refer to the Church? It does not. It refers to the nation Israel, and, in particular, to the Messianic kingdom (which so largely figures in Old Testament prediction), as a comparison of Joel 3 with other Old Testament prophecies will settle conclusively. Then, next, Peter charges home the responsibility for the crucifixion of the Messiah upon the nation Israel (22, 23), reminding them of the “miracles and wonders and signs” which Jesus had wrought among them. Then, at this point, Peter breaks forth in the new message of the resurrection and exaltation of the crucified Jesus, showing it to be the fulfilment of Messianic prediction (24-33).

Such, then, is Peter’s sermon of the day of Pentecost. It is addressed to *Israel*. The supernatural phenomena are explained as fulfilling Old Testament prophecy concerning the promised Messianic *kingdom*. The crucified but now exalted Jesus is declared to be the promised *King*. Then, when the hearers ask what they shall do about it, Peter exhorts them to repentance and baptism into the Name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of their sins, and in order to their participating in the blessing of the now-outpoured Spirit. Then Peter finally adds: “For the promise [that of Joel, and the kingdom promise of Old Testament prophecy in general] is *UNTO YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN*, and [afterward] to all that are afar off [Gentiles], as many as the Lord our God shall call.”

As for Peter’s *second* public address (chapter 3: 12-26), a mere glance will be sufficient to show us its centre-point of significance. There are two striking things about it—first, the admission that there was ignorance in the crucifying of Jesus, and second, the promise that the Lord Jesus would return *then*, if the people of Israel repented and received Him. Verses 17 to 21 read as follows.

“And now, brethren, I know that through *ignorance* ye did it, as did also your rulers; but those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ should suffer, He hath thus fulfilled. Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, and the times of refreshing [i.e. the predicted age of the kingdom] shall come from the presence of the Lord; and He shall *send Jesus Christ* who was proclaimed before unto you; whom the heaven must indeed receive until the times of the restoration of all things [i.e. the regathering in the kingdom age] of which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets from of old.”

What can this mean but a renewed offer of the Messiah-King Jesus and the Kingdom of Heaven to the Jews? And is it not equally clear that these words of Peter utter the promise that the Lord Jesus would return, and the times of restoration set in without delay, upon the repentance and conversion of Israel? Here is the fact, clearly stated, that had there been a national repentance and acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Christ, on the part of Israel, the second advent of Christ in power and glory would have taken place then and there. Never was a more direct promise given.

THE THREE PIVOTAL EVENTS

This brings us to a consideration of the three pivotal events in the Acts, and the final issue of the book. Those three turning-points are,

The outrage against Stephen (7: 57-60)

The outbreak against Paul (22: 22)

The outgoing to the Gentiles (28: 28)

The Outrage against Stephen

Everything in the first part of the Acts (1-12) either leads up to or results from the outbreak against Stephen. In each of these earlier chapters of the Acts we have first *miracle* and then *witness*. The miracles were meant to prepare the way for the message. They were supernatural

evidences, in accord with Old Testament prophecies such as Joel's, that the long-promised kingdom was potentially or incipiently present, and the message was that if the nation, welcoming these evidences, repented and accepted the renewed offer of Jesus as Christ and King, He would return, bringing the kingdom fully. We see also, in these earlier chapters, that in each case, *after* miracle and witness, there is *opposition* by the Jewish authorities.

Final Indictment of Nation

All this comes to a head in the outrage against Stephen. First, in the miracles, message, and martyrdom of Stephen we see a *final indictment of the nation*. Stephen's historical review before the Sanhedrin was meant to show how, again and again, Israel had rejected the witness of God's Spirit, until at length, under the influence of their perverted leaders, the people had gone to the ugly extreme of murdering the Messiah Himself. Stephen is charging home intelligent and conscious guilt for the heinous dual sin, first of crucifying the Son of God, and now of resisting still further the graciously renewed witness of the Divine Spirit. Ignorance may be pleaded no longer. The Jewish leaders have seen, heard, understood, and resisted.

They had been forced to admit the *miracles*; but what they could not deny they hypocritically fought, as we see in such passages as the following.

“What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them” (4: 16, 17).

“By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one. Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him (which is of the sect of the Sadducees) and were filled with indignation [lit. jealousy], and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison” (5: 12, 16, 17, 18).

Similarly, the *witness* of the Apostles had been first-hand, straight, and obviously sincere. There could be no mistaking.

“Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said unto them: Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole, be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved” (4: 9-12).

“Peter and the other apostles answered and said: We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so also is the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that obey Him” (5: 29-32).

Yet what was the result? “When they [the leaders] heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to *slay* them”! Their knowing resistance of God became completely unmasked at the trial of Stephen—“*Ye do always resist the Holy Spirit*”.

Wrapped up in their trial of Stephen was God’s final trial of *them*. Those who rose up against Stephen could not resist “the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake”. Yet they could and did resist the *witness*.

When Stephen fell beneath the pelting stones, he could not plead ignorance for his murderers, even though his last breath was a prayer for them. His dying cry was a beautiful echo of the Lord’s own plea on Calvary. Yet whereas the plea of the crucified Saviour was one which sought to *lessen* guilt, the prayer of dying Stephen *exposed* it—“Lord, lay not this *SIN* to their charge”. The measure of a man’s ignorance in the committing of sin largely determines the measure of his guilt before God. The measure of ignorance which could be pleaded for the Jews in their

perpetrating of our Lord's death on Calvary determined the measure of *their* guilt. Could it *then* be said, "They know not what they do"? That could not *now* be said as Stephen died. Here was wilful, knowing, blatant refusal of divine testimony. The nation was publicly tried and found guilty.

Final rejection of renewed offer

In the martyring of Stephen we see Jewish leadership officially rejecting the renewed offer of the kingdom. Chapter 6: 7 says that "the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem", and "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith". So although the mass of the people had not identified themselves with the message, the leaders had a golden opportunity to give honest direction. Yet they oppose the supernatural witness with jealous rage, resorting to threat, imprisoning, beating, and plotting assassination! The stoning of Stephen was the first officially instigated persecution of the Christians, and the signal for a mob uprising against them. Tradition has it that over two thousand died in that first officially incited outbreak against the Nazarene and His followers. It was indeed the desperate measure which expressed Jerusalem's further rejection of Jesus as Messiah-Saviour-King.

First out-movement of evangelism

Third: the martyrdom of Stephen started the first outward movement of evangelism from the Jewish capital. "They were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles" (8: 1). "They that were scattered abroad *went everywhere preaching the word*" (4). "Then Philip went down to the city of *Samaria*, and preached Christ unto them" (5). "And they [Peter and John] . . . preached the Gospel in *many villages* of the Samaritans" (25). Still further, "Philip . . . preached in *all the cities* till he came to Caesarea."

All the remaining chapters in the first part of the Acts deal with this first outward movement, showing how witness was borne to key cities and persons.

- Ch. 8 Samaria—Ethiopian chancellor
- 9 Damascus—Saul the future Paul

10 Ceasarea—Cornelius the centurion
11 Antioch—Ministry to Gentiles

Fourth; the outbreak against Stephen occasioned *the transference to a new centre, Antioch*. See chapter 11: 19, “Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice and Cyprus and Antioch, preaching the word to none but Jews only.” From this point Antioch begins to take the lead. Jerusalem still retains nominal leadership. It is still the centre of authoritative pronouncement, for the Twelve remain there, and there is still its uniqueness arising from sacred associations; also it remains for all time the historic cradle of the new faith. Yet in *strategic* importance it is Antioch which now comes to the fore.

In a special way “the hand of the Lord” is with them at Antioch. “A great number” believe and turn to the Lord there. Jerusalem sends Barnabas down to Antioch. Barnabas brings Saul from Tarsus to Antioch. The disciples are first called “Christians” at Antioch. The base from which the great Pauline missionary campaigns are conducted through the empire is Antioch. It is Antioch which now sends relief to Jerusalem and Judaea. The whole of the second part of the Acts proceeds from what happens at Antioch—for Jerusalem has now said its final “We will not have this Man to reign over us.”

Thus, the emergent *primary* significance of this first part of the Acts is: THE RENEWED REJECTION OF THE KINGDOM OFFICIALLY AT THE JEWISH CAPITAL.

ADDENDUM

I am well aware, of course, that some who chance to read these lines may not find it easy to readjust their thinking into conformity with what we are here teaching. I, too, had that same difficulty until I made time to study carefully through the whole narrative again, in order to make sure. Perhaps the two most sensitive points of hesitation are: (1) Surely the Apostles were sent out by our Lord to preach a Gospel of *individual salvation* to “all nations” and to “every creature”, not just a re-offer of the Messianic kingdom to the one nation, Israel. (2) Surely the Acts of the Apostles *does*

record the historical beginning of the Christian Church, not just a re-offer of the “kingdom” to the earthly Israel; for in verse after verse of those early chapters, it is the church, the church, the church, which is mentioned (2: 47, 5:11, 8: 1, 3,11: 22, 26,12: 1, 5,13: 1, etc.) not just the “kingdom”.

The answer in both cases is straightforward. Yes, our Lord certainly sent out His Apostles with a message of salvation to “every creature”; but at the beginning that message was *conjoined* with the further offer of the kingdom to Israel. If not, why was the command so definite that they must “begin at *Jerusalem*”?—and why is the obligation so definitely impressed all the way through, “to the *Jew first*”? Had our Lord commissioned the Apostles to preach *only* the Gospel of free grace to all men, the obviously proper thing would have been to spread out far and wide from the first. Why keep wasting time on a resentful, obstinate, offensive and comparatively insignificant little Jewry? Also, let it be reflected, if Israel *had* responded, there would have been the greatest spiritual revival conceivable, accompanied by the speediest thinkable evangelizing of the whole race with the Gospel of grace to “every creature”; the Lord would have returned; and, in accord with the Old Testament Messianic prediction, “all nations” would have come into the blessing of the “Gospel” *and* the “kingdom”.

As for the repeated occurrence of the word, “church”, in those early chapters of Acts, that is merely a matter of translation, as we pointed out in our chapter: *What is the Church?* It would have been far better to translate the Greek word, *ecclesia*, by its truer English correspondent, “assembly”, so as to guard us against prematurely reading *into* the word meanings which it does not acquire until later, in the Epistles. All unknown, except to God Himself, those first groups of believers were indeed the first units in what became later revealed and perceived as the Christian Church; but that does not in the least alter the fact that in those Apostolic days the *primary* operation was that of bringing the Gospel (including *both* the re-offer of the kingdom and the message of individual salvation) to the people of the covenant nation. And it is still true that therein lies the first, far-reaching *dispensational* meaning of the Acts.

A RE-SURVEY OF THE ACTS

PART TWO

As noted in an earlier part of these studies, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, are the Pentateuch of the New Testament. The Book of the Acts is the New Testament Deuteronomy. Strikingly enough, both Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Old Testament, and Acts, the fifth book of the New, are records in which God gives His people a *second, chance*. Deuteronomy is *deuteros nomos*, or second giving of the Law. The Acts is the second offer of the Kingdom of Heaven to the Jew—first at the capital, to the Jews of the homeland, then through the Roman world to the Jews of the Dispersion.

We ask a patient following as we now re-traverse the second area of the Acts (chapters 13 to 28), because it is on the basis of the data supplied in these chapters that we draw our final conclusions as to the big and abiding meanings of the Acts for the present age—and for our own day in particular.

J.S.B.

A RE-SURVEY OF THE ACTS

As we have now seen, the gloomy fact emerging from the first part of the Acts (Chapters 1 to 12) is the further and final repudiation of Jesus as Messiah-King by the Jews of the homeland. But what of the millions of Jews distributed round the Roman world, the Jews of the “Dispersion”? Will *they* accept the message? This must yet be seen. Hence, the second half of Luke’s narrative (13-28) is taken up with Apostolic witness concerning Christ and the kingdom to the Jews of the Dispersion—a reaching out to “the uttermost part of the earth”. Here again we see strict adherence to the earlier pattern—“the Jew first”, and then “also to the Gentile”.

The Outcry Against Paul

The second pivotal crisis in the exciting story is *the outcry against Paul*, and the attempted lynching of him in the frenzied furor of the mob at Jerusalem (Chapter 22). It is when we take this in relation with what precedes and what follows that we see its decisive significance.

Paul is called “the apostle to the Gentiles”. He was made so by divine appointment; but in the actual working out of things he became so only by the constraint of circumstances. In every place he visited, as we now see in his missionary itinerations, he went “to the Jew first”; and it was only when his own “kinsmen according to the flesh” spurned the message that he “turned to the Gentiles”.

The First Missionary Journey

The first Pauline missionary journey is given in chapters 13 and 14. It begins: “Now there were in the assembly that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said: Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have

called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. . . .” Where did Paul and Barnabas go? The following are the places mentioned.

Salamis	13: 5
Paphos	13:6
Perga	13: 13
Antioch in Pisidia	13: 14
Iconium	13: 51
Lystra and Derbe	14: 6, 20
(Return journey	14: 21, 22)

When Paul and Barnabas went this round, how and where, in each place, did they begin with their witness?

The first place is *Salamis*, the principal town on the east coast of Cyprus. This is what we are told: “When they were at Salamis they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.” Note that it was to the Jews only. Note, too, the word, “synagogues” (plural) which indicates the large prevalence of Jews in that area.

The next place is *Paphos*, away at the western extremity of the island. It was the capital, and the residence of the Roman governor. There is no record of the preaching there, but that it was to Jews is clear by implication. Why did Paul and Barnabas begin with the island of Cyprus at all? Was it not because of the great population of Jews on the island? Not only were there so many Jews in Salamis that several synagogues were needed there; we are told that “the number of Jews was so great [in the island] that in A.D. 116 they rose upon the native inhabitants and massacred 240,000”. Evidently it was this thick population of Jews which drew Paul and Barnabas there. It is significant, too, that although there is no record of the preaching at Paphos, there is the account of Paul’s encounter with Elymas the sorcerer, who was a Jew—“a sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew” (13: 6).

The third place mentioned is *Perga* in Pamphylia, but it is only mentioned as being *en route*—“Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John [Mark] departing from them returned to Jerusalem. But when they departed from Perga. . . .”

The fourth place is *Antioch in Pisidia*. “ They came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the *synagogue* on the Sabbath day.” Here again they go “to the Jew first”.

Next is *Iconium*. “ They came to Iconium. And . . . they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews” (13: 51, 41: 1).

The last two places are *Lystra and Derbe*. “They fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about.” Of Lystra it is simply written, “And there they preached the Gospel”. Of Derbe it says, “And when they had preached the Gospel to that city and had disciplined many they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch.” It is easy to see why no synagogue is mentioned. Those cities were heathen centres. “And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia: The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men! And they called Barnabas, Jupiter, and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands . . .” (14: 11-13). Paul and Barnabas had been compelled to flee for their lives from the Jews at Iconium, and had found refuge in these two heathen cities of Lycaonia, some forty miles to the south. Presumably they would not have gone there at all had they not been compelled to flee there for refuge.

So, with the exception of Lystra and Derbe, in every case, the two Apostles went “to the Jew first”, and therefore began at the synagogue. As for Lystra and Derbe again, besides the probability that there was no synagogue at either, it may be doubted whether there were Jews in those two places at all. The narrative says: “And there came thither Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people (non-Jewish: Gk. *ochloi*; not *laos*, used distinctively of the Jews) and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.”

What was the *message* which the two Apostles preached on this first missionary expedition? Luke’s reports are necessarily severe abbreviations; but the gist is clearly preserved. Moreover, he summarizes it at the end of the itinerary: “And when they had preached *THE GOSPEL* to that city, and had disciplined many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium and Antioch [in Pisidia], confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into *THE KINGDOM OF GOD* (14: 21, 22). The message was that of

JESUS AS MESSIAH-KING AND PERSONAL SAVIOUR. See the main facts and results in flat analysis.

THE FIRST MISSIONARY TOUR

Place	Method & Message		Reaction and result	
Salamis	“To Jew first”	General	Nothing said	Nothing said
Paphos	”	message: The	Opposed by Jew, Elymas	Received by Gentile
Antioch	”	“Faith” and	Some respond, Jews oppose	“Lo, we turn to Gentiles”
Iconium	”	The	Some respond, Jews oppose	Flight to Lystra
Lycaonia	”	“Kingdom”	Persecution from Jews	Many Gentile disciples

Thus we see that the Jews were more and more closing the door against Apostolic witness, and that at the same time the “door of faith” was being opened to the Gentiles (14: 27). From the opening visit to Cyprus, it would seem as though the two evangelists had intended to go exclusively to the Jews. In Antioch and Iconium they are forced to recognise that they *cannot* go exclusively to the Jews, though they still go to the Jew primarily (13: 46). When we see them as fugitives in Lycaonia they have been fairly driven out to the Gentiles!

On returning to their home base they “rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles”. They bear no glad report of Jewish repentance and reception of their witness. The one bright relief is this opening of the door to the Gentiles. A great transition is taking place. More and more we see those other words assuming prominence—“*And also to the Gentile*”.

The Second Missionary Journey

The second Pauline missionary journey is recounted in chapters 15: 36 to 18: 22. It begins: “And some days after, Paul said unto Barnabas: Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.” Paul and Barnabas, however, decided to go separate ways; whereupon “Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God: and he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the assemblies”.

The opening verses of chapter 16 report the inclusion of young Timothy in the Pauline band (1-5), then an undetailed tour “through Phrygia and Galatia” (6-8); then Paul’s vision of the “man of Macedonia” (9-11); and then, in verse 12, we reach Philippi, for the first preaching of the Christian message on European soil. The following are the places visited—

Philippi	16:12-40
Thessalonica	17:1-9
Berea	17:10-14
Athens	17:15-34
Corinth	18:1-18
Ephesus	18:19-21

When Paul, with his little group, went this second round, how and where, in each place, did they begin with their witness? Let us see.

The first place is *Philippi*. “Loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis, and from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony; and we were in that city abiding certain days. And on the Sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down and spake unto the women which resorted thither” (16: 11-13).

Note the outstanding facts. Besides being the “chief city” of that part, Philippi was a Roman “colony”, which means that it was a military settlement. These Roman colonies were organized on the model of the great Rome itself as to government, laws, language, and external forms. On the Sabbath (which, of course would be observed only by whatever small percentage of Jews might be there among the population) Paul and his

friends “went out of the city, by a river side” to a place where prayer “was wont to be made”—a place legally permitted for Jewish worship; and there they “spake unto the women which resorted thither”, which procedure indicates the fewness of the Jews in Philippi and the absence of a synagogue. Professor J. A. Alexander remarks: “The mention of women only has been variously explained . . . but on any supposition it is worthy of remark with what fidelity Paul carried out *his plan of addressing the Jew first*”. That is the thing to note specially. Although there was no synagogue in the Roman colony and essentially Gentile city of Philipp Paul went to the Jews; and it was only force of circumstances which brought him out to the Gentiles, as the narrative shows.

The second place visited was *Thessalonica*, capital city of Macedonia, residence of the proconsul, and where the Jews had long been numerous. We read: “Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging that the Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead, and that this Jesus, whom [said he] I preach unto you, is the Christ” (17: 1-3). So here, again, Paul went “to the Jew first.”

The third place is *Berea*. “The brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea; who, coming thither, went into the synagogue of the Jews” (17: 10). Beyond mistake then, here again the procedure is “to the Jew first”.

The next place is *Athens*. Whenever we think of Paul at Athens we think of his great utterance from Mars Hill: but how did the Apostle *commence* his witness in that city? We read: “They that conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed. Now while Paul waited for them at Athens his spirit was stirred in him when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore he disputed [i.e. reasoned] *in the synagogue with the Jews and with the devout persons*, and in the market daily with them that met with him” (17: 15-17). Here again the approach is “to the Jew first”.

Now comes *Corinth*. We are told that in this great city the Jews were very numerous. As in all the cities already visited, the Apostle seeks the Jew first, and therefore begins at the synagogue. “After these things Paul

departed from Athens and came to Corinth, and found a certain Jew named Aquila, born of Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; and . . . he abode with them. . . . And he reasoned in the *synagogue* every Sabbath, and persuaded [i.e. sought to convince] the Jews and the Greeks [Gentile proselytes in the synagogue]. But when Silas and Timothy were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in spirit [i.e. he became even the more constrained by the Holy Spirit] and testified to the *Jews* that Jesus was the Christ” (18: 1-5). Here again it is “to the Jew first”.

The next place is *Ephesus*, away back across the Aegean Sea from Achaia to Asia again. Paul’s visit to Ephesus on this occasion is a very brief one. He merely calls there on his way back from Corinth to Caesarea and Jerusalem and Antioch (the Judaeian home base) at the end of this second missionary circuit. The account reads: “And Paul, after this, tarried there [at Corinth] yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into [i.e. for] Syria [to go to Jerusalem and Antioch], and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea, for he had a vow. And he came to Ephesus (capital city of old-time Asia), and left them (Priscilla and Aquila) there: but he himself *entered into the synagogue* and reasoned with the *Jews*. When they desired him to tarry longer with them he consented not, but bade them farewell, saying: I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem; but I will return again unto you, if God will” (18: 18-21).

The return journey is given in verses 21 and 22. “He sailed from Ephesus; and when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up [i.e. to Jerusalem] and saluted the church [or assembly there] he went down to Antioch [his home base]”.

So we see that *in every place* visited on this second itinerary the message was taken *to the Jew first*. It was only force of circumstances which drew out the wider message to the Gentiles.

What was the *message* spoken at these places? Only in the case of Thessalonica is Paul’s preaching in any way particularized. We are told that there he “reasoned” in the synagogue, “opening and alleging that the Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead [that is, it was necessary in the divine purpose as revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures], and that this Jesus whom [said he] I preach unto you is the Christ” (17: 2, 3). It is evident, too, that Paul stressed the offer of the

kingdom, and the Messianic kingship of Jesus, for when the mob rose up against the Apostle and his companions there, the outcry was, “These that have troubled the world are come hither also . . . *saying that there is another King—Jesus*” (17: 6, 7). The threefold message at Thessalonica was (1) that the promised Messiah was to be a self-sacrificing Sin-bearer [a doctrine which the Jews had largely lost sight of]; and (2) that the promised Messiah was the crucified and now risen Jesus of Nazareth; and (3) that the now exalted Lord Jesus was offered to Israel as being indeed their promised Messiah-Saviour-King.

What was the *reaction* to the message on this second missionary tour? The following abstract gives the answer.

THE SECOND MISSIONARY TOUR

Place	Method & Message		Reaction and result	
Philippi	“To Jew first”	(1) The promised Messiah a Sinbearer	Unrecorded (Lydia is won)	On to Thessalonica.
Thessalonica	”		Some accept; Opposition	Flight to Berea
Berea		(2) That Messiah is Jesus, crucified but risen	Many accept; Opposition	Flight to Athens
Athens	”		No Jewish response	Out to the Gentiles
Corinth	”	(3) Jesus is now offered as King, Messiah, Saviour	Bitter opposition	“Henceforth to Gentiles”
Ephesus	”		Not recorded till later	Back to home base at Antioch

Such was the method, message and outcome of the second Pauline missionary adventure. Although at Thessalonica the response seems very favourable at first, it is only “some” of the Jews who accept the word; the “multitude” who accept are Greeks (17: 4). The one cheering spot (so far as *Jewish* inclination is concerned) is Berea, though even there it is clear that the larger part did not respond. Jewish opposition seems to have reached high-water mark at Corinth (18: 6, 12, 17). It is in connection with this that we have the last recorded word spoken by Paul before his return journey to the home base, and it is significant—“From henceforth I will go *unto the Gentiles*”.

The Third Missionary Journey

The account of Paul’s third missionary journey runs from chapter 18: 23 to 21; 3. It begins: “And after he had spent some time there [Antioch] he departed and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples”. Then, following the reference to Apollos and his ministry at Ephesus (18: 24-28), “Paul, having passed through the upper parts [the inland districts of Galatia and Phrygia], came to Ephesus” (19: 1).

The whole of chapter 19 is devoted to Paul’s eventful campaign in Ephesus. “He went *into the synagogue*, and spake boldly for the space of three months, reasoning and persuading as to the things concerning *the kingdom of God*. But when some were hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them [Jews], and separated the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for the space of two years, so that all they which dwelt in Asia [the old-time Proconsular Asia only, comprising Ionia, Aeolia and Lydia] heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (8-10. R.V.). Although many of the Jews opposed Paul, a great work spread out, largely, it would appear, among the Gentiles (19-21).

As Ephesus is the only place, in this third missionary expedition, at which Paul’s ministry is described, it is well to note here the method, the message, the reaction and the result. The *method* was, as before, “to the Jew first” (8). The *message* was “the kingdom of God” (8). The *reaction* was largely unbelief and opposition on the part of the Jews (9, 13), though there

seems also to have been some small measure of response. As to the *result*, there was a turning to the Gentiles, among whom a widespread movement developed (9, 18-20).

Observe here Paul's first reference to *Rome*. "After these things [at Ephesus] Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying: *After I have been there I must see Rome*" (21). As we have said, there are three cities which figure commandingly in the Acts—Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome. Until now Jerusalem and Antioch have been the focus points; but following this third missionary journey, the whole movement is toward the final witness of Paul at Rome. Under an obvious divine control, events follow one upon another like the successive scenes of a drama, until the peerless Apostle is deposited in the imperial capital, to preach Christ and His kingdom under the very shadow of Nero's throne. The way Paul expresses himself here, in Acts 19, seems to suggest that he himself already sensed a kind of divine necessity that he must eventually go there—as indeed there was (23: 11).

On leaving Ephesus, Paul "departed for to go into Macedonia" (20: 1). Then, when he had "gone over those parts" and had "given them much exhortation", he "came into Greece, and there abode three months" (2, 3). Next, because of a Jewish plot against him "as he was about to sail into Syria", he went back "through Macedonia", leaving from Philippi, and sailing back across the Aegean Sea to Troas, where he and his party "abode seven days" (3-6).

Now comes the return to Judaea and Jerusalem. Verse 16 is noteworthy. To go from Troas to Judaea meant sailing by Ephesus. Would Paul therefore call again at Ephesus? No; he had a high reason for by-passing it. Verse 16 explains: "For Paul had determined to sail past Ephesus because . . . he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at *Jerusalem* the day of *Pentecost*". Exciting hours were to befall him at that Pentecost in Jerusalem!

In lieu of visiting Ephesus again, however, Paul sent for the elders of the Ephesian assembly of disciples to meet with him at Miletus, a little lower down the coast; and there he gave them final exhortation. The account of this farewell address to the Ephesian elders is one of the most touching passages in the New Testament, revealing the generous-heartedness and tender solicitude of the great Apostle, as well as the strong affection between himself and those Ephesian believers. But what is of

unique importance to our present study is that this final address, coming right at the end of the three missionary journeys, sums up the Apostolic message for us in clear words: “Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the glad tidings of *the grace of God*. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching *the kingdom of God*, shall see my face no more” (20: 24, 25).

Here, right at the end, the double message is finally declared—“the *grace of God*” and “the *kingdom of God*”. Paul’s message to the Jews of the dispersion, like that of Peter to the Jews of the homeland, was first the national message, the renewed offer of the kingdom to Israel, accompanied now, however, with the worldwide message of personal salvation, irrespective of race, through the crucified and risen and ascended Messiah-Saviour, who was yet to return in glory—which return was at that time contingent upon the Jewish national response to the renewed offer of Jesus as Messiah-King. That Paul preached this great hope of the Lord’s return is made clear beyond all contradiction by his epistles to the Thessalonians, written while Paul was on these missionary travels.

So, then, the Jews of the dispersion have now had the message preached to them in these three eventful missionary tours of Paul, as well as in the unrecorded witness of others, such as Barnabas. What are the recorded results? One only needs to look back over the analyses of the first two itineraries, and then over this briefer third excursion which needs no analysis, to realize the sorrowful fact that the Jews of the dispersion have exhibited the same attitude as their kinsmen in the homeland. Although appreciable numbers have responded in two or three places, the vast majority have rejected and opposed. Alas, the stubborn cry has been, “We will not have this Man to reign over us”! When Paul returns to Jerusalem after his third missionary tour, what does his report mainly say? Chapter 21: 19 tells us: “And when he had saluted them [James and the elders], he declared particularly what things God had wrought *AMONG THE GENTILES* by his ministry”. It is of momentous meaning, especially in the light of what now follows in Jerusalem.

Paul at Jerusalem—the outcry!

Thus we reach the second of the three events in the Acts. Paul is at Jerusalem at the annual Pentecost (20: 16). At the Jewish capital there are “devout men *out of every nation under heaven*”. The Jews of the Dispersion are represented by the thousands who have come from the various parts of the Roman world, to be present for the celebration. Paul is now only too well-known to them as a result of his three evangelistic expeditions. They are now about to utter their fierce, final repudiation of him and his message.

Mark well that it is “*the Jews which were from Asia*” (21: 27) who drag Paul into prominence and instigate the riot against him. Their cry is a spark to dynamite. “All the city” is soon “in an uproar”!—and it is only swift intervention by the military police which averts Paul’s being done to death (30-32)! But the battered and bruised Apostle is yet to make his heroic “defence” from the castle stairs to the angry crowd of his fellow-nationals (22: 1-21). It is a spirited and stirring utterance: but the Apostle is not allowed to complete it. The very instant he allows a certain remark to pass his lips, the mob gives one mighty yell for his death. It is this frantic outburst at this certain point which gives the occasion its pivotal significance. Verse 22 says: “And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices and said: Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live! And they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air. . . .”! What, then, was it at which they so violently stampeded? It was this:

“AND HE [JESUS] SAID UNTO ME: DEPART, FOR I WILL
SEND THEE FAR HENCE UNTO THE GENTILES.”

Yes, they “gave him audience unto *this word*, and then lifted up their voices . . .”! It was the representatives of the Jews of the Dispersion, united with their unbelieving nationals of the homeland, uttering their loud and final rejection of Jesus as their Christ, and of the salvation message to the Gentiles. This latter was intolerable to them. It infuriated and maddened them in their conceited bigotry. They would not themselves receive the kingdom, but they were determined that no semblance of privilege should be accorded to the Gentiles.

Everything from the beginning of chapter 13 has been leading up to this point; and we now find that all which follows it is eloquently resultant from

it.

Chapter 23 Paul before the Sanhedrin
Chapter 24 Paul before governor Felix
Chapter 25 Paul before governor Festus
Chapter 26 Paul before king Agrippa
Chapter 27 Paul sent from Judaea to Rome.

We may thus crystalize the significance of this second crisis-point in Acts 22. (1) It marked the climax of Jewish hatred against Paul and his message; (2) It was the representative refusal by the Jews of the Dispersion; (3) It was the event which opened up Paul's witness to Christ before the governing officials of Rome; (4) It was the event which led to Paul's final witness at Rome itself (23: 11, 25: 11, 12, 26: 32).

It is interesting to note how the three decisive crisis-points in the Acts are linked together. In this twenty-second chapter, just before the murderous outcry, Paul says, "*And when the blood of thy martyr, Stephen, was shed, I also was standing by. . . .*" (20). See also the connection with the soon-coming crisis-point at Rome. Just after this outcry against Paul, we read: "And the night following, the Lord stood by him, and said: Be of good cheer, Paul; for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, *so must thou bear witness also at Rome*" (23: 11).

The Outgoing to the Gentiles

The final crisis-point of the Acts is reached in chapter 28. After a hazardous voyage (27: 1-28: 15) Paul at last sets foot in Rome (28: 16). Not being a criminal in the ordinary sense, and perhaps on the recommendation of the courteous centurion, Julius, under whose custody the Apostle had been brought to Rome (27: 1), Paul is given a measure of privilege (28: 16), as had been the case during his imprisonment at Caesarea (24: 23), and during the voyage to Rome (27: 3). Although apparently fastened by a chain to a praetorian (28: 20), he is allowed to live in his own rented apartment (30). After the first three days in Rome, he calls together the chief Jews, to explain his presence there, and to fix a day for interview.

When they came, what was it to which the Apostle gave testimony? See verse 23: “And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him, into his lodging: to whom he expounded and testified the *kingdom of God*, persuading [i.e. endeavouring to persuade] them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the Prophets from morning till evening.” Note: even after all the Apostle’s discouraging experiences his approach is still “*to the Jew first*” (17), and only afterward “also to the Gentile” (30); and the subject of his testimony is still “*the kingdom*” (23. 31).

In that interview between Paul and those Jews of Rome the Acts completes its purpose and assumes a final significance. With the full record before us, we ourselves know well enough how the Rome consultations eventuated, but Paul did not know in advance what the reaction would be. He had painful memories of the disbelief and hostility shown by his kinsmen in the homeland and in different parts of the empire; but doubtless he would cherish eager hope that those Jewish leaders at the imperial capital might favourably receive the wonderful truth after hearing it put clearly and fully. We can well imagine that he would prepare prayerfully for the meeting with them. He would spare no pains in his earnest efforts to prevail upon them, realizing that if *those* Jewish leaders were to embrace the truth and declare their acceptance of Jesus, it could have powerful repercussions elsewhere. Here, then, in this twenty-eighth chapter, is Paul’s final effort to convince the Jews. It is the effort to convince them through their influential representatives at the world’s metropolis.

Here, too, the result: “And some believed the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. And, disagreeing with one another, they departed. . . .” (24, 25). We get the impression that even those who “were persuaded” did not receive the word with anything like enthusiasm. As the Greek word indicates, it was more a case of mental assent or credence, merely, than a glad acceptance into the heart. The others definitely rejected the word. The total result is made plain in verses 25-27, “And, disagreeing among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word: Well spake the Holy Spirit by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying: Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see and not perceive; for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they

should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them” (25-27). Immediately following this, the final crisis-point comes in the fateful words

“BE IT KNOWN THEREFORE UNTO YOU, THAT THE SALVATION OF GOD IS SENT UNTO THE GENTILES, AND THAT THEY SHALL HEAR IT.” (28)

Already in the first part of the book, we have seen the Word rejected and opposed by the Jews of the homeland, and forced out to the Gentiles. We have seen the same thing happen on each of Paul’s three missionary tours among the Jews of the Dispersion in various parts of the Roman world. But here at Rome, and in this last chapter of the Acts, we see the culminating endorsement of Jewish unbelief toward Jesus of Nazareth; the complete Jewish refusal of the re-offered kingdom; and the final, solemn, most deliberate pronouncement that henceforth, in the Divine purpose, Israel is to be by-passed, and the message of salvation proclaimed direct *to the Gentiles*.

With this third and most significant crisis-point, the Acts closes. It has reached its tragic goal, and fulfilled its intended purpose. Over a period of thirty years, the renewed offer of the Kingdom of Heaven has been made to the Jews of the homeland, then to the Jews of the Dispersion throughout the Roman world, then to the Jews at the imperial city. With that message of the re-offered kingdom there has been coupled the wonderful message of the Messiah’s saviourhood through His self-sacrifice on Calvary and His victorious resurrection. But, in general, the Jewish attitude has been unbelieving and hostile everywhere. The concluding episode at Rome is the final corroboration—THE JEWS HAVE SAID “NO” TO THE RENEWED OFFER OF JESUS AS ISRAEL’S CHRIST AND KING AND SAVIOUR. THE “KINGDOM” IS NOW TO BE WITHDRAWN AND HELD IN ABEYANCE. FOR THE TIME BEING (i.e. FOR THIS PRESENT AGE) THE NATION ISRAEL IS TO BE SET ASIDE AS GOD’S REPRESENTATIVE PEOPLE ON EARTH, AND A FAR SURPASSING GOSPEL OF WORLD-EMBRACING DIVINE GRACE IS TO BE MADE KNOWN AMONG ALL THE NATIONS OF THE GENTILES.

Having brought us to this point, we repeat, the Acts has reached its goal and fulfilled its purpose. Many have thought that it is an unfinished record because of its abrupt termination; yet that very feature is a parting emphasis upon the *dispensational* purport of it. Admittedly, there is much which we would like to have been told about Paul's closing days on earth; and, doubtless, had it been necessary, it would have been preserved for us; but it was not necessary to the main purpose, so it is omitted.

We do not say that Luke had no intention of adding more. It may well be that he had in mind to bring his narrative to a more formal finish with some further, completive material. But in the overruling providence of God the book ended just where it did. Whatever may be said about the ending from a literary point of view, its last statement most decidedly completes the record so far as its strategic significance is concerned—which is the vital thing. Israel has said a capital “*NO*” to Jesus as Messiah-Saviour-King, and to the renewed offer of the kingdom.

The book has thus brought our minds to the place where they are ready to turn onward to the Christian Church Epistles, to learn there of the wonderful new movement in the on-going Divine purpose, hitherto hidden in the secret counsels of the Godhead, but now revealed as Heaven's sublime answer to Jewish unbelief —namely, *THE CHURCH*, the mystic body and bride and temple of God's Redeemer-Son.

RE-THINKING THE ISSUES

THE ACTS (3)

Back of all that foes have plotted,
 Back of all that saints have planned,
Back of schemes by men or demons,
 Moves a higher, hidden Hand.

Warp and woof are Heaven's making,
 All the pattern good and wise;
Tho' on earth's side oft perplexing,
 Clear and right to heavenly eyes.

All earth's agents act with freedom,
 Choosing, whether love or hate,
Faith in God, or bold defiance;
 None are shackled slaves of fate.

Yet the Hand that guides is hidden,
 Moving secret and unseen,
Firmly guiding life's great drama,
 Every act and shifting scene.

Even human wrath, unknowing,
 Serves the one controlling Will;
Man proposes; God disposes;
 All things His design fulfil.

To that goal of all the ages,
 All of history's windings tend;
And despite all foes or factions
 God proves Victor in the end.

Arthur T. Pierson (?)

RE-THINKING THE ISSUES: ACTS (3)

WITH a conviction which the foregoing review has confirmed in our mind, we now reaffirm that the Acts of the Apostles is not primarily an account of the founding of the Christian Church, as is generally supposed, but a report of the renewed offer of Messiah-Jesus and the long-promised “Kingdom of Heaven” to the nation Israel. Certainly, it was that people’s refusal of the renewed offer which historically *occasioned* the emergence of the Church on earth; but the fact remains that the distinctive subject of the Acts is this renewed offer of Christ and the Messianic kingdom to Israel. The far-reaching meaning of that we shall here reconsider.

It is only when we turn on and read through the Epistles that we find revealed the deeper movement of Divine purpose which was operating concurrently with that renewed rejection of Jesus as Messiah-King. The further offer of the kingdom, as we have seen, was rejected, first by the Jews of the homeland, then by the Jews of the Dispersion. All over the Roman world, however, groups of true believers were formed, and as Jewish unbelief in general became increasingly adamant, these groups of intermingled Jewish and Gentile believers came to assume a new meaning.

Just as the awful deed of Calvary had been Divinely foreknown and overruled—inasmuch as the crucifixion of the nation’s Messiah had been sublimated into the atoning sacrifice of the world’s Saviour, so also this further failure of Israel’s leaders and people had been omnisciently anticipated, so that now, under the sovereign operation of God, these groups of believers, scattered throughout the Roman world, became seen and known, through inspired eyes and pens, as the first assemblies of those blood-redeemed, Spirit-born human beings who constitute the spiritual *CHURCH*, the mystic body and bride and temple of the Eternal Son.

Paul tells us that it was to himself that the “mystery” of the Church was first disclosed (Eph. 3: 3-11). Until then the Church had been a secret “hid in God” and concealed “throughout the ages”. Clearly this means that the Church of the New Testament cannot be the subject of Old Testament

prophecy. Therefore, the effort to read it *into* Old Testament prophecy, whether it be into Joel 2 or any other passage, is wrong. Certainly, the Church is *latently* anticipated in the Old Testament again and again in type and foreshadowing; but it is nowhere the subject of direct prediction. Now, however, as the tragic story of Jewish unbelief unfolds itself to the last paragraph of the Acts, we see these many little groups of believers, up and down the Roman world, transfigured by the light which breaks on them from the Epistles. From the ashes of Jewish unbelief there rises up this wonderful new spiritual building, the Church, of which these little groups are the first units. Lo, an elect bride for the heavenly Isaac! A spiritual temple for the glorified Lord! A mystic body for Him who is “Head over all things”! Behold, “the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men”! A new age breaks! The kingdom, twice refused by unbelieving Israel, is now, for the time being, held over; but the purpose of God moves on unthwarted. We do not wonder that Paul himself, contemplating but one aspect of this profound “mystery”, should exclaim, “Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11: 33).

We stress it again, however, that *only* in the light of the Epistles do we perceive this deeper significance in these newly formed assemblies of believers scattered throughout the Roman world during the suspense-period of the Acts. The word “church” in verses like Acts 2: 47 should be changed to “assembly”, lest we prematurely read meanings into the word, “church”, which it only acquires later.

New Light on Pentecost

Once we grasp that in its *primary* meaning the Acts of the Apostles is the renewed offer of the Messianic kingdom to Israel, as distinct from the supposed instituting of the organized Christian Church, we see the whole phenomenon of Pentecost in a new light—in its *true* light. This guards us against certain popular modern errors. It exposes the fundamental mistake of present-day Pentecostalism, and the fallacy of the new mis-emphasis on “speaking in tongues,” and the faulty basis of the big faithhealing campaign.

There are numerous groups today teaching that the miracles associated with that long-ago Pentecost and the days of the Apostles should be just as much in evidence *now* as they were *then*. Moreover, nearly all evangelical believers seem to have the idea, often perhaps vaguely, that somehow our present-day Christian experience ought to square with that of those early days recounted in the Acts. Well, if that miraculous Day of Pentecost away back in Acts 2 *was* the declared inauguration of the organized *Church*, and if those Apostolic days of long ago were therefore an intended *norm* for the Christian Church throughout this present age, then those who say that the Pentecostal miracles should be in operation today are quite right, and we really have no answer to them.

But *was* that historic day of Pentecost the declared inauguration of the Church?—and did those Apostolic days set a norm for the Church in later days? The answer is, No. When Peter was asked what was the meaning of the Pentecostal effusion and its supernatural effects, did he reply: “Men and brethren, this is the beginning of a new and wonderful institution called the Church or Assembly of the Lord Jesus Christ”? No; he replied, “This is that which was spoken through the prophet Joel.” When we consult the Joel passage, has it anything to do with the New Testament Church? Nothing whatever, as we have before mentioned. It is very decidedly one of the Old Testament passages which we call *kingdom* prophecies.

As for those Apostolic days setting a *norm* for the Christian Church (which was then as yet unrevealed and humanly unknown), on the contrary they were intendedly *abnormal*. The speaking in “tongues” and the startling miracles were divine “signs” to Israel that the renewed offer of the kingdom was *bona fide*. The thirty-years interval covered by the Acts was a suspense-period in which, although God foreknew the outcome, the human will remained free, and events were allowed (as always) to take their natural course. Therefore, viewed from the human side, everything hung on Israel’s Yes or No to the renewed offer. Primarily, and to the best of their intelligence, the Apostles were offering the *kingdom*, rather than knowingly establishing the *Church*. When Israel’s impenitent aversion to our Lord Jesus crystallised into utter, final rejection, the Apostolic suspense-period was over. When the Apostles died, that abnormal interval died with them.

That period was never meant to set a norm for the *Church*, except in its *spiritual* lessons. The Apostles were never meant to have “successors”. Not

one of them ever became a priest or ever ordained one. Not one of them was even a pastor or minister at a local “church” in the sense that Timothy and Titus were. The very idea of “Apostolic succession” in the ministry of the Church is a fiction built on a vacuum. Similarly, the teaching that “speaking in tongues,” and healing miracles, and raisings of the dead, are meant to be in operation today *because* they happened away back *then*, is assumption without foundation. If we would know what are the permanent “gifts” of the Spirit to the Christian *Church*, we must turn to the “Christian Church Epistles” which follow next *after* the Acts.

Those who see Pentecost solely as the emergence of the Church are on the horns of a dilemma. Observing the contrast between those first days and our own, they must explain it in one of two ways. Either they must chide themselves (and most others) for not having the old-time *faith* to “appropriate” the supernatural endowments of Pentecost; or else they must say that those supernatural endowments have to a large extent been *withdrawn* since Pentecost.

Most evangelical believers prefer the first of these. If only we had faith, they say; faith such as the Christians had in those Pentecostal days, we could see all those supernatural signs manifesting themselves again today. How blameworthy, how unbelieving we are! Why do we not have faith, and reclaim those Pentecostal powers? Among sincere believers, especially among the enthusiastic younger who long to serve effectively, what heartburning this often occasions! what joyless self-rebuke! what puzzling frustrated-ness! And, after it all, the problem of the difference between “then” and “now” remains unsolved.

On the other hand, those who resort to the explanation that the supernatural Pentecostal endowments are now *withdrawn* are in equal difficulty. Does Scripture tell us of any such withdrawal from the Church? Or are we (as some argue) in a different age or dispensation from that of the Apostles? The answer to both these questions is “No”. For *if* such a withdrawment has taken place, *when?* and *why?* Some reply that those supernatural works were necessary as divine credentials at the *formation* of the Church, and for the first propagating of Christianity, but they are no longer needed now, inasmuch as Christianity is well established: hence they disappeared. But those of Pentecostal persuasion cogently insist that for

many reasons the Pentecostal miracles *are* needed today, especially in Christian effort among the millions in the unevangelised areas of the world.

Neither of those alternatives will do. What, then, are we to say? Well, the whole problem arises through seeing Pentecost solely as the founding of the Christian Church. How often we have heard Convention speakers hold up Pentecost as the norm of Christian experience, and of the Church's ministry! Yet, in the light of our foregoing study, what a misconception that is! To those who scourge themselves with the thought that they are denied the Pentecostal gifts because they do not have such faith as the first-century Christians, we say: Read through the Acts again, and see whether it was a matter of their greater faith at all.

Transition-Period Peculiarities

Let us make a simple test. We are all familiar with that form of teaching today which urges Christian believers to seek "*the baptism of the Holy Spirit*". On the basis of what happened at Pentecost, it is declared that God has provided this wonderful "baptism" for all who are truly Christ's, and that He will give it to all who in faith claim it. The "tongues" groups insist that the sure attestation of the "baptism" is speaking in tongues. Pentecost is declared to be the "original", the God-given pattern for Christian experience. The Pentecostal "baptism" is as much for us today as it was for those who first experienced it, two thousand years ago. It is a great thing to have been "born anew" of the Spirit, to have become spiritually alive in Christ; but there is this "second blessing", this "baptism of the Holy Spirit". If we seek it, yet do not experience it, our faith is as yet somehow defective. We must persist in prayer; we must agonize, until faith is strong enough to lay hold of the promise and make the "baptism" ours!

Can such teaching be squared with the Acts? It cannot. We turn, for instance, to chapter 8. The people of Samaria "believed" Philip's preaching concerning "the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ," and "they were baptised, both men and women" (12). Here, then, were believers who were also baptized in water. Verse 16 tells us, however, that "as yet" the Holy Spirit had "fallen upon none of them". Did they therefore start praying and agonising for this? Or did they exercise a faith such as we do not seem to have today; a faith which enabled them to "claim" the blessing? Not at

all! Peter and John were sent to them from Jerusalem; and when those two Apostles “laid their hands” on them, those Samaritan disciples received the heavenly enduement thereby, without a moment’s delay.

Turn to chapter 10. Peter is at Caesarea, and is addressing the Gentile household of Cornelius, the godly “centurion”. They were not, as yet, “believers”. Suddenly, while Peter is telling them of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit falls on all present, so that they begin to “speak with tongues” before ever they have had chance to signify their belief in the message, and before there has been any thought whatsoever of their first being baptized in water (44, 46, 47). There certainly was no “agonising” or exercising of any superior sort of faith *then*!

We turn on again to chapter 19. Paul meets those twelve “disciples” at Ephesus. As soon as they are now baptized in water, “into the name of the Lord Jesus” (5), Paul lays his hands on them, and the Holy Spirit comes upon them, so that they “speak with tongues” and “prophecy” (6). Again there is no praying or agonising, no working up of faith to “claim”. The Spirit’s infilling, with miraculous results, follows immediately Paul’s laying on of hands.

Need we add more references? We might point to the miraculous healing brought about through Peter’s shadow, and by the healing handkerchiefs carried from Paul, along with other extraordinary phenomena mentioned in the Acts, to show further that it was no matter of a superior faith which was being exercised; but we forbear. We have cited enough for our purpose. The reason why the phenomena of Pentecost are not in evidence now, as they were then, is not because either faith or sincerity is inferior to that of the first days. Those extraordinary phenomena during the Apostolic days were spectacular “signs” given from God at a particular time, for a particular purpose. The Israel situation which called them forth *then* does not exist today. They were extraordinary tokens from heaven, primarily to Israel; unmistakable divine confirmations of the Apostolic message that the crucified Jesus was indeed Israel’s Messiah, and that the Messianic kingdom was in all reality being offered again to the nation.

So (let us emphasize it just once again) that long-ago Pentecost is *not* the norm of Christian experience or of the Church’s ministry; for this book of the Acts is recording, not the specific institution of the Church, but primarily the renewed offer of the *kingdom* to Israel. The miracles

performed by the Apostles, and the sudden descents of the Holy Spirit upon those new believers, were “*signs*” that the kingdom was again drawing near, in offer. When that kingdom was rejected, those abnormal signs dropped away. They were a first instalment, an incipient fulfilment (though rendered abortive by Jewish unbelief) of Old Testament prophecy, such as Joel’s, concerning the Messianic kingdom. And they will burst forth again in full bloom when Christ returns and the Messianic reign actually begins.

But if Pentecost is not the norm of Christian experience and of the Church’s ministry, what is? The answer, as we have said, is found in that part of the written Word which is specifically written *to* Christian believers of the present dispensation, namely, THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH EPISTLES AND THE PASTORAL EPISTLES (ROMANS TO PHILEMON), though not altogether excluding the later epistles in our New Testament. If we would know what is God’s present provision for the Church and its Spirit-born members, we must turn especially to those Epistles—which we shall consider later.

New Light on Strange Problems

Second: when we recognise that this book of the Acts is the renewed offer of the Messianic kingdom to Israel, we find that certain seeming enigmas in the record become at once intelligible and harmonious.

Take first chapter 6: 7. “And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and *a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.*” Which thoughtful reader can come across this verse without pausing and puzzling? Does not the Gospel teach us that the Moses covenant is now abrogated by the New Covenant in our Lord Jesus Christ? Does it not tell us that the old order of the priests and the sacrifices is now done away by the one perfect priesthood and sacrifice of our Lord Jesus? Were not the Old Testament priesthood and sacrifices merely a temporary typifying and foreshadowing of that great reality which has now displaced them? When a Jew today accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour, does he not realize this, and make a complete break from Judaism? Yet here, in Acts 6: 7, this company of the priests who were “obedient to the faith” seem to have been unaware of any inconsistency between their having accepted the Apostles’ message and their still

continuing with their offering up of the usual Temple sacrifices, and the performing of their other priestly functions in connection with the Temple. To us, today, it seems an impossibility to reconcile the two; but evidently those Jewish priests of the Apostolic times did not find it so!

Or turn again to chapter 8. We are told that the Samaritans “believed” (12). Now today, when a person really “believes” on the Lord Jesus Christ, accepting Him into the heart as Saviour, that person thereby becomes “born anew” of the Holy Spirit. That is not only what we preach: it is what is experienced in tens of thousands of lives. What, then, about those Samaritans who “believed”? Were *they* regenerated, or “born anew” of the Holy Spirit? Verse 16 tells us that “as yet” the Holy Spirit “*was fallen on none of them*”. What shall we say to that? Well, some of those who hold that these early chapters of the Acts describe the founding of the Church, would reply that these Samaritans, being “believers”, must certainly have been now regenerate, but that the Holy Spirit had as yet “fallen on none of them” in the sense that they had not as yet received the “*baptism*” of the Holy Spirit. But that explanation will not do. One of those Samaritan “believers” was a man named Simon, a sorcerer. He was impressed, like the many others, with Philip’s miracles and message. He is definitely said to have “believed” and then to have been “baptised” in water (13). Yet in terrible words Peter later declares this baptised “believer” to be in a state of most awful estrangement from God (20-23)! This man, then, although a “believer” and “baptised”, certainly was *not* regenerate! What shall we say to *that*? Well, at least, we ought to be frank, and admit that if this book of the Acts is recording for us the founding of the Church, and if those “first days” are the “norm” of Christian experience, then we are up against another strange enigma in the book—unregenerate “believers”!—unregenerate although baptized converts of the Spirit-filled Philip!

Turn on to chapter 15: 4, 5. “And when they [Paul and Barnabas] were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the assembly and of the Apostles and elders; and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up *certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed*, saying that it was necessary to circumcise them [i.e. Gentile believers], and to command them to keep the law of Moses.” What shall we say about *that*! However could a Jewish Pharisee become a “believer” on the Lord Jesus, and still *remain* a Pharisee? Yet quite evidently that is what happened in

those “first days”; and probably many of those who were both “believers” and Pharisees had sustained this dual connection for some years (for this fifteenth chapter of the Acts carries us to a point about eighteen years after the first coming of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles in chapter 2).

Nor is that all. Turn over to chapter 21: 17-20. “And when we [Paul and his helpers] were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following, Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles. And when they heard it they glorified the Lord, and said unto him: Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are *WHICH BELIEVE*, and they are all *ZEALOUS OF THE LAW*.” But if they were really “believers” on the Lord Jesus as their personal Saviour, how could they thus be “zealous of the law”? Is not the whole point of the epistles to the Romans and the Galatians (not to mention passages in other epistles) that grace and law are sheer opposites; that salvation by faith and salvation by works are mutually exclusive ideas? Is it not written that “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified”? And is not the message of the Gospel most plainly this, that all who would be saved by divine grace, through faith, must for ever renounce all trust in selfmerit, or “law” works? How, then, could those “believers”, in the days of the Acts, be “believers” and yet remain “zealous of the law” of Moses?

We might point to other similar problems in the record, such as Paul’s taking Jewish vows upon himself (18: 18, 21: 24-26), but we have mentioned enough for our purpose. If Pentecost was specifically the founding of the Church, and if those Apostolic days were the “norm” of Christian experience, then, frankly, the foregoing passages are strange features to account for! Look up the usual run of commentators. Where those anomalous verses are not skipped over, what forced “explainings” one finds! Such “explainings” would never have been tendered if only it had been recognised that the narrative is describing, not the “norm” of Christian experience, but phenomena which were *strictly peculiar to that abnormal suspense-period*.

Is it not clear that the “believing” of those temple priests, of those Samaritans, of those Pharisees, of those many others who remained “zealous” to keep the Mosaic law, was not exactly the same kind of faith as

that which we now exercise upon the Lord Jesus for our personal salvation; the faith which brings us our “new birth” and occasions our immediate renunciation of all trust in “law” works? The “believing” which was directed toward Jesus in response to the renewed kingdom-offer through the Apostles was mainly an accepting of Jesus in His office as Israel’s Messiah-King. It was a “believing” which evidently did not raise the issue of the utter incompatibility of “law” and “grace” or of “faith” and “works” as the means of salvation. Neither, apparently, was it necessarily and always accompanied by regeneration (as we noted in connection with chapter 8).

How pathetically wrong it is, then, for sincere Christians of today to be accusing themselves of having poorer faith than those “believers” of the Apostolic days because the miraculous signs of Pentecost are not reproduced among us today! As we have seen, it was not that those believers of long ago had a mightier faith, but that God Himself was putting forth His power in certain special ways for a special purpose at a special time.

All this has important exegetical bearings on the New Testament *Epistles*, particularly certain passages which seem to contradict each other. How many of us have been perplexed by the apparent contrariness between Romans 8: 35–39 and Hebrews 6: 4–8!

Romans 8
(*eternal security*)

“Neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”

Hebrews 6
(*saved, but lost again*)

“It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, seeing they crucify the Son of God afresh”

What logomachy there has been over that Hebrews paragraph! Some settle it conclusively (at least to themselves) that the phraseology denotes

born-again believers, who, notwithstanding their regeneration can “fall away” from their new life in Christ, and become irrecoverably “lost again”. Others are just as able to prove (at least to themselves) that the wording, when investigated critically, does *not* describe the truly born-again. Surely the pen-war could have been ended if two decisive factors had been sufficiently regarded: (1) those to whom the epistle is addressed, i.e. to THE HEBREWS; (2) its special reference to the abnormal suspense-period covered by the Acts of the Apostles.

As the historical interval covered by the Acts drew to its end, and the nation Israel, especially through its religious leadership, had become implacably hostile to the Nazarene, all those many priests and Pharisees who were “believers” on Jesus as Messiah-King (Acts 6: 7. 15: 4, 5), and those other thousands of similar Jewish “believers” who were still “zealous of the Law” (21: 17–20) had to make the most excruciatingly painful decision of their lives.

Remember: the Judaism to which those Jews were attached was an authenticatedly *Divine* religion; the only religion ever given to men directly by God Himself. That glorious temple, that hereditary priesthood, those divinely appointed sacrifices, those meaningful ceremonies, those supernaturally inspired Scriptures which documented them all, surrounding them with God-given ethic and Messianic hope—those, with all their national and hallowing associations, were the most inviolably sacred and venerated of all things to the devout Jew. Remember, too, it was the Jewish *religious* world which had crucified Jesus, and which was now disowning Him even more intolerantly. As it would seem, the Divine religion itself of which Jesus was the fulfilment and consummation was utterly repudiating Him. A point had come where to go on with Jesus meant a break with all those unspeakably treasured inheritances, perhaps with business, social and family estrangements almost unendurable. It meant going to Jesus “*outside the camp*”, bearing “His *REPROACH*”.

At *our* conversion to Christ we make a choice which many of those early Hebrew believers of that suspense-period had apparently *not* made, and had not seen the *need* of making when *they* first “believed”. It is to *them* that the words of Hebrews 6 are addressed. Need we add more? Why re-open the battle between Calvinistic versus Arminian interpretations of Romans 8 and Hebrews 6? Romans 8 was written to truly born-again

believers, whether Gentile or Jew. Hebrews 6 was written to *Hebrews only*, in that abnormal suspense-period; to Hebrews who must now make a *further* decision toward Jesus. (*We return to this later.*)

The Acts and our Lord's Return

Furthermore, when we recognise the Acts as being the renewed offer of the promised Messianic kingdom to the nation Israel, rather than the introduction of the supra-national *Church*, we come into a truer intelligence concerning our Lord's second coming to this earth.

As we have observed, in chapter 3: 17–21, God's clear promise to the leaders and people of Israel was, that if, in response to the Apostolic re-offer, they were to repent of their unbelief, and receive the now-risen Jesus as their Messiah-Saviour-King, God would forthwith send Jesus back to them, bringing in the promised times of restoration and blessing associated with the predicted reign of Israel's Messiah.

“Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, and the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord: *AND HE SHALL SEND* [i.e. back to you] *JESUS CHRIST WHO WAS PROCLAIMED BEFORE UNTO YOU* [i.e. before His crucifixion and resurrection].”

Plainly, therefore, at that time our Lord's return was a *contingent* event—contingent upon Israel's reaction to the new appeal through the Apostles. This, of course, further explains our Lord's word to the Twelve: “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power” (1: 6). For the Apostles to have known in advance “that day and hour” would have been their also knowing in advance Israel's further refusal of the kingdom; and the new offer could never have been made. In the words of James, “Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15: 18), and it is in His omniscient foreknowledge that He pre-adapts the foreknown responses of the human will. Thus, while He never leaves His ultimate purposes at the mercy of man's inconsistent will, nevertheless, in the outworking of things to a divinely predetermined goal, He honours the freedom of the human will all

through, and sovereignly overrules according to His foreknowledge of what man will do. Events are allowed to take their natural course, while concurrently God shapes them to the eventual accomplishing of His own superplan. Thus, in all genuineness, the further offer of the Messianic kingdom was made, as recounted in the Acts; and the return of Christ was contingent, for the time being, upon the Jewish reaction.

This explains why, in those *earlier* Pauline epistles of the suspense-interval covered by the Acts, our Lord's return is spoken of as though it might happen any moment, whereas in the *later* epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus) there is not the same impression of its impendence. The grand prospect of the Lord's return is still as brightly there, but now a great new concept swings into commanding prominence, taking the precedence for the time being, and claiming the soul's wonder—the *CHURCH* as the mystic body and bride and temple of God's eternal Son.

We do not say that there is a rigid demarcation between the earlier and later Pauline epistles in their teaching about our Lord's return; yet the difference of emphasis is distinctly there, and the explanation of it is the swing of the pendulum in the Acts of the Apostles.

The more we reflect on it, the more we discern a controlling divine wisdom in the fine poise which those Thessalonian epistles maintain between seeming to imply the imminence of the Lord's return, and yet carefully withholding any time-commitment. It was necessary that those early believers should live in the expectancy of the Lord's return; that there should be queries about those of their number who were falling asleep before the Lord's return occurred; and that an inspired Apostle should write them about this, along with various other counsels, so that *we, today*, upon whom the end of the age is closing in, might possess God-given light and guidance, as well as they.

Paul did not know that he was writing for Christians nearly two thousand years later as well as for those of his own day: but God knew, and guided the pen accordingly. Nor has God guided the pen only: there is surely divine design in the very *order* in which the Church Epistles now occur in our New Testament. Is it without significance that those two Thessalonian Epistles, which were written *first* in order of time, should now appear *last* in order of reading? In every known manuscript of the New

Testament the order of the Church Epistles is the same as that which is preserved in our own English Bible. Is that order without purpose? We think not. When the second offer of the Messianic kingdom was rejected, not only did the supernatural “signs” of the kingdom drop away; the promised second coming of our Lord Jesus receded. Precious as that Advent hope was, and still is, it was not now to be the *first* element in the evangelical message. Romans must come first, with its great doctrine of justification through faith, supplemented by Corinthians and Galatians; then Ephesians, with its profound revelation of the *Church*, supplemented by Philippians and Colossians; and then, finally, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, with their crowning hope-message of ultimate translation and rapture at the return of the twice-rejected Messiah, the Church’s heavenly Bridegroom.

Take a further parting look at that dispensationally far-reaching pronouncement with which the Acts of the Apostles ends—

*“BE IT KNOWN THEREFORE UNTO YOU, THAT THE
SALVATION OF GOD IS SENT UNTO THE GENTILES, AND
THAT THEY SHALL HEAR IT.”*

Our Lord’s return is no longer in any way dependent on Israel’s attitude. *That* contingency has passed for ever. Yet does it not seem as though now, in some real sense, it is contingent upon a *further* historical development? See Romans 11: 25,

*“For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery,
lest ye be wise in your own conceits, that a hardening in part is
befallen Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.”*

Does not that “until” indicate contingency? How then is that “fulness of the Gentiles” to be completed? Is it not in some sense by our own co-operation? See 2 Peter 3: 12 which, more literally translated, reads: “Expecting and *hastening* the coming of the day of God.” Weymouth renders it “*helping* to hasten”. We are touching deep mystery, but it would certainly seem as though that great “Day” has been made again in some sense contingent upon human response. If further confirmation of this is required, see verse 9: “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise . . . but is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish.” The

tardiness is on our part, not God's. We Christian believers who are called to be "co-workers together with Him" (2 Cor. 6: 1) are somehow involved in this contingency of the longed-for consummation. We blame Israel of long-ago, yet how lethargic many of us present-day Christian believers are! With a clearer grasp of the Acts may there come to us a new challenge! Let us "spend and be spent" in hastening the promised "Day"—by unabating daily prayer for the progress of the Lord's cause among men; by bearing our earnest, grateful, untiring witness for the dear Saviour wherever we can, and by endeavouring in all appropriate ways to bring in "the fulness of the Gentiles."

"EVEN SO, LORD JESUS, COME QUICKLY!"

THE “CHRISTIAN CHURCH” EPISTLES

It is hardly possible to exaggerate the extent, the permanence, the vast importance, of those services which were rendered to Christianity by Paul of Tarsus. It would have been no mean boast for this most heroic worker that he had toiled more abundantly than such toilers as the Apostles. It would have been a sufficient claim to eternal gratitude to have preached from Jerusalem to Illyricum, from Illyricum to Rome, may be, even to Spain, the Gospel which gave new life to a weary and outworn world. Yet these are, perhaps, the least permanent of the benefits which mankind has reaped from his life and genius. For it is in his Epistles—casual as was the origin of some of them—that we find the earliest utterances of that Christian literature to which the world is indebted for its richest treasures of poetry and eloquence, of moral wisdom and spiritual consolation. It is to his intellect, fired by the love and illuminated by the Spirit of his Lord, that we owe the first systematic statement, in their mutual connection and interdependence, of the great truths of that Mystery of Godliness which had been hidden from the ages, but was revealed in the Gospel of the Christ.

F. W. Farrar

THE “CHRISTIAN CHURCH” EPISTLES

AMONG the world’s great religions, Christianity is the only one which teaches by *letters*. This unique feature well merits our appreciative notice as we now look through the epistolary area of our New Testament. We have good reason to be grateful that the foundation truths and distinguishing doctrines of the Christian revelation were not communicated to us in colourless catechisms, formal dissertations, or tedious compendiums.

It is a mark of divine *sympathy* toward us, in our human frailty, that we are invited to learn soul-saving truths through those very human letters. Coming to us in that form, those saving and sanctifying truths have a warmth of emotion, a throb and thrill and freshness, an aliveness with human interest, and a personal nearness to us which they could never have had otherwise.

Could any kind of literature give us a more fascinating union of the divine and the human than inspired *letters*? Those of our New Testament came into existence as naturally as any letter which was ever written, yet they *supernaturally* express such profoundly redemptive, time-outlasting truths as elsewhere *never* were written. They constitute, indeed, a literary phenomenon unmatched outside of themselves, unless, perhaps, by that other marvel, the evolution of Messianic prediction through the Hebrew prophets.

Necessity, Strategy, Adaptation

In the epistles of the New Testament we see a remarkable blending of necessity, strategy, and adaptability.

The *necessity* for them grew with the outreach of Christian witness, the increasing number of believers, and the emerging of widely distributed Christian assemblies through the evangelistic travels of Paul and the other Apostles. Authoritative standards of doctrine and practice needed committing to some kind of written permanence, so that assemblies, or

“churches”, might have them for continuing reference. Questions required answer; problems called for counsel; deviations in believing or behaving must be corrected. New converts and local groups alike needed guiding and guarding by more than transient contact.

There were only two ways to meet the need: (1) continual visitation, (2) written instruction. The first was impossible, and the second was beset by difficulty. In those days travel was slow, hazardous, uncertain; and the absence of any postal system made frequent correspondence impracticable. The need was for inspired Apostolic letters which in minimum number should give sufficient authentic direction to the churches for as long as the age should last.

The *strategy* of the Apostolic letters will be at once apparent. They had a warmth of approach which no abstract treatise ever has. They had a directness to the heart which no purely objective treatment of a subject could ever have. They required no scholastic flourish or philosophical finesse such as belonged to other kinds of writing, and which could have put them beyond the mental apprehension of the “rank and file”—many of whom could neither read nor write. They were written for a practical, as distinct from an intellectual purpose; and they fulfilled their purpose by communicating divine truth with that vibrant aliveness and writer-to-reader interest which belong *only* to such personal letters. Let it be understood, therefore, that the New Testament letters were never meant to be models of literature; nor did their writers even remotely suspect that in writing to local groups about concerns of their own day they were writing for the Church universal through all the succeeding centuries. Those letters were a product of most natural human impulse; yet the human impulse was interpenetrated by the supernatural constraint and control of the Holy Spirit. Thus a new class of literature emerged—the *Apostolic letter*.

Furthermore, do we not see in those Apostolic letters a divine genius of *adaptation*? What could be more effectively adapted, both to writers and readers? Take Paul: the communicating of truth by letters was peculiarly appropriate to a nature like his. The eager spirit and emotional glow, the vivid sympathy and impetuous indignation, the sorrowing anxiety and spontaneous jubilation, all so natural to Paul, found an unencumbered freedom in his letters, compared with which the rounded periods of a formal thesis would have been like prison fetters.

And could any kind of writing have been more suitably adapted to the generality of *readers*, both then and to the end of the present age? For a general description of the Church's average membership see again 1 Corinthians 1: 26–29. In the main, the members of the churches do not consist of intellectuals, theologians, or literary experts!—but most, if not all, can appreciate the feel and force and fire and forthrightness of such letters as Paul's, directly addressed to them.

Again, Paul's style as a writer is so full and complex that his letter-writing provides a unique vehicle of expression for the Holy Spirit; so that while great truths concerning salvation and the Church and the Christian life are written plain for all to read, there are also below-the-surface treasures and often unsuspected further meanings which again and again surprise those who are searchers as well as readers. Thus those letters not only give permanence to the Holy Spirit's teaching for the Christian Church, they clothe it with an interest which becomes the more captivating the more we study them.

Relation to the Four Gospels

If the New Testament Epistles are to speak most meaningfully to us, we need ever to bear in mind their relation to the four Gospels. That relation is both contrastive and complete. In the Gospels our Lord Jesus is *presented*. In the Epistles He is *interpreted*. That is, in the Gospels we see Him as He is *in Himself*: whereas in the Epistles we see Him as He is meant to be *to His people*. In the Gospels we have the Jesus of *history*. In the Epistles we have the Christ of *experience*.

There can be no firm building without sure foundation. In the four Gospels we have the solid *base*. In the Epistles we have the secure *building*. In the four Gospels we have the historical *facts*. In the Epistles we have the spiritual *truths* arising from them. For instance, when 1 Corinthians 15: 3 says, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures", it at once links *fact* stated in the Gospels with *truth* developed in the Epistles; and it authenticates both by the seal of Old Testament prophecy.

1. "Christ died"—that is the basic *fact* reported.
2. "For our sins"—that is the saving *truth* emerging from the fact.

3. “According to the Scriptures”—that is the supernatural seal of prophecy.

All the way through these Epistles we are learning doctrinal truths which are involved in and developed from the historical *facts* reported in the Gospels. It has been truly said that there is scarce any flower of doctrine blooms in the Epistles, but the seed is found in the Gospels. I remember being challenged once on that point. Where in the Gospels (I was asked) do we find the germ from which comes Paul’s “mystery” of the Church’s sudden translation?—

“Behold I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet. For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be *raised* incorruptible, and we [believers still alive on earth at that time] shall be *changed*”—1 Corinthians 15: 51, 52.

Where in the Gospels do we find a hint of any such Apostolic disclosure, not only that the bodies of *departed* believers should be resurrected, but that suddenly, in conjunction therewith, the bodies of believers then *living on earth* would be suddenly immortalized? The answer is in John 11. Lazarus of Bethany has died. Jesus says to Martha, “Thy brother shall rise again”. Martha replies, “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection *at the last day*” (24). Observe that Martha’s reply turns the mind to the end-of-the-age resurrection which is yet to be. This evokes our Lord’s profound reply (often misunderstood) which, when the Greek verb-tenses are exactly translated, reads:

“I am the Resurrection and the Life. He that believeth on Me, though he *shall have died* [i.e. before that resurrection day] yet shall he live. And whosoever *is living* [on earth at that time] and believing on Me shall *never die* [i.e. shall not ‘sleep’, but shall be ‘changed’]”.

So, in a special sense our Lord is the “Resurrection” to the one class, and the “Life” to the other. His reply to Martha is indeed the germinal anticipation of Paul’s Rapture “mystery” in 1 Corinthians 15. This seed-

and-flower connection between the Gospels and the Epistles is endlessly fascinating.

The Redemptive Starting-Point

Yet it is equally true that in their development of the truth which saves, the Epistles begin where the Gospels leave off. In our Lord's earthly life there were seven outstanding events: (1) His birth, (2) His baptism, (3) His temptation, (4) His transfiguration, (5) His crucifixion, (6) His resurrection, (7) His ascension. The seven are inseparable, of course: yet the first four belong specially to His manhood, while the remaining three belong specially to His saviourhood. It is the latter which are the redemptive starting-point of the Epistles.

Liberalist critics, who are always willing to find some new lever to pull against the evangelical view of the Bible, have tried to make much out of the circumstance that Paul and the other writers of the Epistles do not directly speak of our Lord's virgin birth. At best, any deduction from such mere non-mention is what the logic book disapproves as "argument from silence". But in this case there cannot be even "argument from silence" or supposed non-mention; for although our Lord's birth of the virgin Mary is not spoken of again in so many words, it is implied all the way through.

Remember: during much of his missionary itinerating Paul had with him, as his travel-companion, *Luke*, the "beloved physician" who wrote the third Gospel; and it is Luke's Gospel which gives us the most detailed account of our Lord's birth of the virgin Mary. At the time Luke travelled with Paul, his "Gospel" was either being prepared or, most probably, was newly in circulation; so Paul knew well enough the inner details of our Lord's miraculous birth as narrated by Luke. Besides that, Matthew's account had been in circulation for some years. Is it thinkable, then, that if Paul had rejected both accounts as untrue he would have condoned them by silence? This is a case where any "argument from silence" confirms the Scriptures and condemns the doubters.

It is just the same in connection with the non-mention of the virgin birth in *John's* epistles. Does John *need* to explain again merely verbally that he, too, knows and fully accepts the virgin birth, after starting *His* "Gospel" with the mighty words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was

with God, and the Word was God . . . and *THE WORD BECAME FLESH*”? Reflect: it is an utterly necessary assumption that if our Lord was *pre-existent*, that if indeed He was and is the eternal Son of God, He could be begotten into our humanity *only* by a miracle—a miracle which absolutely excludes His having a human *father*, but absolutely necessitates His having a real human *mother* to bear Him into incarnation.

Besides this, by the time the Apostle John lived at Ephesus the arch-heretic, Cerinthus, the Gnostic, was teaching there that the earthly Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary by merely natural procreation, and that the divine Christ entered Him at the Jordan baptism, but vacated Him again later. Cerinthus is said to be “the earliest known impugner of the Virgin Birth.” With that in mind, recall John’s words, “Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus [the human] is the Christ [the divine]?” “Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come *in the flesh* is of God. And every spirit which confesseth *not* that Jesus Christ is come *in the flesh* is not of God: and this is that Antichrist whereof ye have heard that it should come” (1 John 2: 22, 4: 2, 3).

We might well argue that verses like Romans 8: 3, “God *sending* His own Son in the *likeness* of sinful flesh,” and Philippians 2: 6, 7, “Being in the form of God . . . emptied Himself . . . *becoming* in the likeness of men,” obviously imply something very different from ordinary human birth. Even more so is it with Galatians 4: 4, where Paul, with evident purpose, *avoids* the ordinary word for birth (though he uses it of others three times in the same chapter) and says, “God sent forth His Son, *become* of a woman.” However, we will add no more except to point out the parallel between Luke 1: 31—35 and Romans 1: 3, 4.

<i>Luke</i>	<i>Paul</i>
“Thou shalt <i>bring forth</i> a Son.”	“His [God’s] Son was <i>born</i> ” (lit. ‘came’).
“His father David”	“Of the seed of David.”
“The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee.”	“According to the Spirit of holiness”
“The power of the Highest”	“With [or ‘in’] power”
“Wherefore called the Son of	“Declared to be the Son of God.”

God.”

The parallel itself says more than any comment of ours could, so we leave it there. But in view of these and other Pauline references to our Lord’s Godhead and assumed manhood, is it not a pathetic clutching at straws when Liberals argue that because Paul does not actually state the Virgin Birth in specific grammar, he therefore does not believe it? Such “argument from silence” is preposterous, especially so in this instance, for the silence is merely seeming, and not real. As Dr. James Orr justifiably observes, “It might as well be argued that Paul did not believe in the existence of Mary, since he never once mentions her.”

Where the Gospels Leave Off

Such critical misjudgments as the fore-mentioned become comparatively irrelevant when we grasp that, in line with a controlling *purpose*, the New Testament Epistles begin where the four Gospels leave off. That controlling purpose explains why, in the Epistles, the emphasis shifts from our Lord’s birth, baptism, temptation, transfiguration, to His death, resurrection and ascension.

When Paul would epitomize in a few sentences the Gospel which he preached, he wrote, “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you . . . by which also ye are saved . . . For I delivered unto you *first* of all how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day” (1 Cor. 15: 1—4). So the “*first*” thing now is not the manger, but the *Cross*; for the Epistles are mainly concerned with expounding the specifically *redemptive* facts of our Lord’s incarnation, i.e. His atoning death, resurrection, ascension, heavenly intercession, and age-end return.

Another aspect of advance from Gospels to Epistles is, that in the Gospels our Lord is shown coming *to* us, and dying *for* us, whereas in the Epistles He is revealed as living *in* us, and working *through* us. In the Gospels *He* becomes one with *us*, by a real human birth. In the Epistles *we* become one with *Him*, by a new heavenly birth. In the Gospels the long-promised “kingdom” is offered. In the Epistles the long hidden “mystery” is

unveiled. In the Gospels our Lord is rejected as King of Israel. In the Epistles He is exalted as “Head over all things to the Church.”

Threefold Grouping

Apart from the Gospels and the Acts, our New Testament is usually said to consist of twenty-one letters and the concluding Apocalypse, or “Revelation”. There is a real sense, however, in which that last oracle of Scripture, also, is a letter; a letter from our ascended King Himself, transmitted through the Apostle John, both by dictated word and by spectacular visions speaking a language more graphic than words.

See chapter 1: 10, where at the outset our Lord says to John, “What thou seest write in a book and send to the seven assemblies in Asia.” Each of those seven letters is addressed to its readers, not by John, but directly by our Lord. Then, right at the end of the book, in chapter 22: 16, 20, we again have the direct, first-person address, covering all that has gone before: “I, Jesus, have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things for the assemblies.” “Surely I come quickly.”

So there is a real sense in which our Bible closes with a vividly illustrated letter from our ascended Lord Himself amid the heavenly glory. In that way, too, among others, the Apocalypse becomes the peculiarly precious crowning-point of Biblical revelation.

Viewing the Apocalypse in that light we see even more readily the threefold grouping of the New Testament Epistles into its two groups of nine with an intervening four. We have commented on this in an earlier chapter, so need not more than mention it again here. First come the nine “Christian Church Epistles” (Romans to 2 Thessalonians); next the four “Pastoral Epistles” (1 Timothy to Philemon); then, last, the “Hebrew Christian Epistles.” These chains of letters are certainly not linked together according to date, but they are just as certainly grouped according to logical order and overall plan.

THE PAULINE LETTERS

Of the twenty-two Apostolic letters in our New Testament, thirteen (possibly fourteen) are from the pen of Paul. What letters they are! They are

the greatest letters ever written, by the greatest missionary who ever lived. We have called them letters as distinct from formal treatises, and such indeed they are; yet the marvel is, that without ceasing to *be* letters in the frankest, freest sense, they are *also* treatises in the true meaning of that word. Some of them, *viz.* Romans and Ephesians, in their theological grasp, syllogistic power, literary skill, and methodical build-up, are sheer masterpieces of profundity in minimum compass.

These letters of Paul are *not the only ones* he wrote, but they are the only ones which have been preserved for us. Even in the earliest of them (Thessalonians) we find reference to others already written (2 Thess. 3:17). We find a similar reference in 1 Corinthians 5: 9, which shows us that the letter which we now call the “*First Epistle to the Corinthians*” was not actually his first to that fellowship. The thirteen (or fourteen) which now live on in our New Testament may truly be called the “remains of the Church’s first missionary correspondence.” When we remember how perishable were the materials on which they were originally written, and how continually in those early days the local assemblies of Christians were broken up and scattered by persecution, we begin to appreciate that the survival of these letters is a marvel of divine providence, as is the survival of the organized Church itself.

Each of these letters was a product of *necessity*: in Corinth internal *disorders*; in Galatia external *deceivers*; in Philippi dislocation of practical *unity*; in Colosse infiltration by Gnostic *heresy*. One of the most remarkable features about the way Paul deals with those faults and perils is that they became answers for *all* time. The deviations in practice and doctrine which Paul then countered have proved to be *typical*. In one garb or another they have recurred ever since. So those first Pauline reproofs and correctives are as necessary today as ever.

They would seem to be *more than ever* necessary in our own latter day, with its recrudescence of ritualism, sacramentalism, sacerdotalism; its Anglo-Catholicism and its new overtures of Papal Rome in our most influential Protestant centres; its subtle, Liberalist philosophies; and, at the other extreme, the new excitement over “tongues,” healings, and other such sensory “manifestations” of the supernatural.

Oh, what a history some of these Pauline letters have had! Think of that one, masterly little polemic which we call his “*Epistle to the Galatians*.” Its

value and vitality as it has travelled the centuries are beyond all computation. As truly as the Epistle to the Romans has been called the *Magna Charta* of the Christian faith, so may the Epistle to the Galatians be called the Christian's *Declaration of Independence*. Who shall measure its mighty impact in Apostolic and sub-Apostolic times, wrenching the early Church free from Judaism and incipient antinomianism? Who shall measure its power in Reformation times, when the Epistle to the Romans and the Epistle to the Galatians, more than any other part of Scripture, nerved Luther to smash through accumulated medieval superstition and libertinism? Who shall measure its potential today, when resurgent Romanism and antinomian religious rationalism are threatening the central citadels of the Christian Faith? This Galatians epistle could transform the Protestant pulpit, and turn the tide of battle again in favour of the original, evangelical Christian Faith.

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH EPISTLES

The nine "Christian Church Epistles" come first (Romans to 2 Thessalonians), all from that matchless pen of Paul. They are the only part of the Bible addressed directly to Christian believers. Thank God, *all* the Bible has been written "*for*" us (Rom. 15: 4, 1. Cor. 10: 11), and we are meant to read it all, know it all, believe it all, receive it all, profit from it all, and propagate it all. Yet only the one part of it is written exclusively *to* us and *about* us as Christian believers, as Christian groups, as members of the mystic body and bride and temple of God's dear Son. That part is these nine "Christian Church Epistles," so called because each is written either to a local Christian church or to a group of such local churches.

For the very reason that they *are* specifically written *to* us, all Christian believers should be the more thoroughly familiar with them. And what a treasury they are! They are a complete course of education in Christian faith, hope, love, life, prayer, conduct, service, and reward. They are a concentrated curriculum in *justification* (our new standing before God), and *sanctification* (our life-union with Christ), and *glorification* (our final rapture in sinless immortality).

Triform Pattern

For a maximum grasp on these nine “Church Epistles” we need to apprehend their three main peculiarities: (1) their triform emphasis, (2) their underlying method, (3) their spiritual progress. We have spoken of this earlier, so give it only briefest re-mention here.

As to their threefold emphasis, they break up into a quartette, a trio, and a duet. The first four belong together—Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians and Galatians. Their central emphasis is *CHRIST AND THE CROSS*. So decidedly is this so, they are distinguishingly known as the “*evangelical*” epistles.

Equally, the middle three belong together—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. All who read these three Epistles sensitively *feel* the shift of emphasis to *CHRIST AND THE CHURCH*. It is in these middle epistles that we first learn about the Church mystical, i.e. the mystic “body”, the mystic “bride”, the mystic “temple”. So they are often referred to as the “*mystical*” epistles.

Even more inseparably the final two belong together—1 & 2 Thessalonians. Who needs any reminding that *now* the emphasis changes to the Lord’s return? *It is CHRIST AND THE COMING*. So we call 1 & 2 Thessalonians the “*eschatological*” epistles (from the Greek adjective *eschatos*, meaning the final things).

Thus the nine Christian Church Epistles break up into triform pattern: the first four *evangelical*, the middle three *mystical*, the last two *eschatological*, with three successive main accents—

1. CHRIST AND THE CROSS (Romans—Galatians)
2. CHRIST AND THE CHURCH (Ephesians—Colossians)
3. CHRIST AND THE COMING (1 & 2 Thessalonians),

As we have said earlier, this order of emphasis is sealed by two remarkable peculiarities. First, although the order of the other New Testament documents varies in different Greek manuscripts and ancient versions, the order of these nine Church Epistles *never* varies, wherever they occur. Second, that order is the more remarkable when we reflect that the Thessalonian letters which have always stood last were undoubtedly written first, while Romans, which has always been group-leader, was one

of the later to be written. Are there not many preachers today who need to learn the sound strategy of preaching the truth in the order indicated by the Holy Spirit?

Underlying Method

Closely associated with the formation of the nine Christian Church Epistles into four and three and two, is their didactic *mode*. In each of the three divisions it takes the line of (1) doctrine, (2) reproof, (3) correction—exactly according to the order in 2 Timothy 3: 16, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction.” Note carefully: “reproof” always has to do with wrong *practice*: “correction” always has to do with wrong *doctrine*.

Take the first *four* of the nine Church Epistles, i.e. Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians. The first of the four (Romans) gives the norm or positive standard of Gospel “*doctrine*.” Next come 1 & 2 Corinthians, in which the characteristic substance is “*reproof*” for wrong behaviour, or default in practice. Last comes Galatians, in which, distinctively, there is “*correction*” of error in doctrine.

Take the middle three. First comes Ephesians, which establishes the positive “*doctrine*” of the long-hidden but now revealed mystery of the Ecclesia, of which Christ alone is the Head, and in which Jew and Gentile lose all separate identity as such in the one new “unity.” Next comes Philippians, in which we find “*reproof*” for default in practice. Last comes Colossians, in which is “*correction*” of Gnostic error in doctrine.

Even in the two short Thessalonian letters, it is the same. The first of them sets the norm. All the way through, it utters “instruction”, or positive truth concerning the Lord’s return. The second adds “reproof” and “correction,” not so much to the Thessalonians themselves, as *through* them to some who “walked disorderly” (wrong practice) and others who would “deceive” them that the “day of Christ” was already “present” (wrong doctrine).

Note the order well: (1) “doctrine”, (2) “reproof”, (3) “correction”. Is there not in this, also, a further intended pattern for preachers and teachers of the Word?

Their Spiritual Progress

Finally, observe the evidently intended progress of spiritual truth in these Christian Church Epistles. We have pointed out that because the New Testament Epistles emphasize and expound the *redemptive* meanings of our Lord's earthly life and death, they begin with the Cross rather than the manger. In line with this, it is noteworthy how these Christian Church Epistles, in their leading characteristics, seem to follow the great redemptive acts of our Lord Himself: (1) His crucifixion, (2) His resurrection, (3) His ascension, (4) His sending down the Holy Spirit, (5) His reigning in heaven, (6) His return in glory.

In Romans the emphasis is upon our Lord's death, resurrection and ascension. In Corinthians and Galatians it is upon corporate fellowship in the Holy Spirit, and (Galatians) individual "walk in the Spirit." In Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, it is on sitting victoriously with Christ in "heavenly places," with our "citizenship" in heaven (Philippians) and our true life "hid with Christ" up there (Colossians). In 1 & 2 Thessalonians it is on sharing in the glory of the Lord's second coming. We are not only "dead and risen" with Christ (as in Romans), nor only "sitting in heavenly places in Christ" (as in Ephesians) but "caught up to meet the Lord in the air," thereafter to be "ever with the Lord"!

There are other features of progress, too, in the threefold order of the Church Epistles. Ephesians, the leader of the middle trio, begins where Romans, the leader of the first four leaves off. Romans *ends* with its one and only reference to the "*mystery* kept secret since the ages began" (16: 25). Ephesians takes up and *expounds* that "mystery" (1: 9, 3: 5).

Romans begins with something openly "*promised*" in the Old Testament prophets (1: 2). Ephesians is concerned with something "*hidden*" from the Old Testament prophets (3: 5—9). Romans begins with *man* and his plight as a sinner (1: 21—3: 20). Ephesians begins with *God* and His purpose through the saved (1: 2—14). In Romans, Jew and Gentile are separate, as sinners before the judgement bar of God (2: 9—16). In Ephesians Jew and Gentile are "one" as believers, in the unity of the "one body," the Church (2: 15, 3: 6, 4: 2, 3). In a word, Romans is explaining a "*Gospel*" to sinners. Ephesians is expounding a "*Mystery*" to believers.

This progress of spiritual idea is seen inside each division of these nine Church Epistles. We mention just one. Take the middle trio again. In Ephesians the accent is on the one “*body*” (1: 23, 3: 6, 4: 4, 12, 16, 5: 23, 30). In Philippians it is on the one “*mind*” (1: 27, 2: 2, 3, 5, 4: 2). In Colossians it is on the one “*Head*” (1: 18, 2: 10, 19). In keeping with this, see the special exhortation, in Ephesians, to *unity* (4: 3, 13); in Philippians, to *harmony* (1: 27, 2: 2—5, 14, 15, 3: 15, 4: 2); in Colossians to *sanctity* (1: 9, 10, 22, 28, 3: 1—4, 12—17).

That great New Testament exegete, the late Bishop Lightfoot, although his approach to these nine Christian Church Epistles is very different from our own in these studies, groups the first four (Romans—Galatians) as being most connected with “the *Cross*”; and the middle three (Ephesians—Colossians) as being specially connected by their subject-matter with “the *Throne*.” Equally noticeably, 1 & 2 Thessalonians are uniquely the epistles of “that *Day*.” Thus these nine epistles progressively link together the past, the present, the future. In the first four, faith looks *back* to the Cross. In the middle three, love looks *up* to the Bridegroom. In the final two hope looks *on*, to the Coming.

The ninefold group as a whole begins at the lowest point, and ends at the highest. It begins with us as hell-deserving sinners under the “wrath of God,” and ends with us as raptured saints sharing the reign of our royal Bridegroom! It begins with us as “beggars” and ends by setting us among “princes” (1. Sam. 2: 8)! It begins by exposing our rags of guilt, and ends by clothing us in robes of glory! Thus do we see the “riches of God’s grace” and the “exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe.” Well may our grateful hearts leap heavenwards in Paul’s Ephesian doxology!—

“Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, age without end. Amen.”

THE PASTORAL LETTERS—AND TODAY

Apostasy, “falling away,” is the act of professed Christians who deliberately reject revealed truth (1) as to the deity of Jesus Christ, and (2) redemption through His atoning and redeeming sacrifice (1 John 4: 1-3; Phil. 3: 18; 2 Pet. 2:1). Apostasy differs therefore from error concerning truth, which may be the result of ignorance (Acts 19: 1—6), or heresy, which may be due to the snare of Satan (2 Tim. 2: 25, 26), both of which may consist with true faith. The apostate is perfectly described in 2 Tim. 4: 3, 4. Apostates depart from the faith, but not from the outward profession of Christianity (3: 5). Apostate teachers are described in 2 Tim. 4: 3, 2 Pet. 2: 1, 19, Jude 4, 8, 11-13, 16. Apostasy in the Church, as in Israel (Isa. 1: 5, 6, 5: 5-7), is irremediable, and awaits judgement (2 Thess. 2: 10-12, 2 Pet. 2: 17, 21, Jude 11-15, Rev. 3: 14-16).

Scofield Note on 2 Timothy 3: 1

THE PASTORAL LETTERS—AND TODAY

WHEN we pass from the nine Christian Church Epistles to the four Pastoral Epistles, we soon sense that the four are a class on their own. Somehow there is a different sound in the voice that speaks through them. Yet beyond mistake it is still the voice of Paul. The imprint of that wonderfully dynamic personality is upon every paragraph.

Paul has been without exaggeration described as “one of the greatest men God ever made”. Going with his thoroughly classical Hebrew-Greek scholarship was an unusual intellectual breadth, a “splendid courage, determined perseverance, understanding sympathy, thorough integrity, consummate tact, and lateral humour”, all blending in one rich but very human personality. Short as his Apostolic letters are, his personality vibrates right through them.

But what is far more important to reassert here is, that in these four Pastoral letters it is not merely the human Paul who talks to us. Through that rich human personality it is the *Spirit of God* who here challenges, instructs, and admonishes *all* Christian pastors, from Timothy and Titus, to the end of this Anno Domini dispensation. Would to God that through the centuries Christian ministers and leaders had faithfully adhered to these simple yet basically sufficient pastoral guides! From what sacerdotal deviations and complications the organised Church would have been saved!

As to their approach, these further Pauline letters are freely *personal*, each being addressed to one individual only. As to their viewpoint, they are wholly *pastoral*, the seasoned confidences of a veteran missionary to under-shepherds of local Christian flocks. As to their tone, they are warmly *paternal*, being counsels to beloved sons in the faith from a spiritual father who now calls himself “Paul the aged” (Philem. 9).

So far as Paul himself is concerned, these letters belong to the close of his ministry. Indeed, they have valedictory touches about them, particularly

so in 2 Timothy, the last letter Paul wrote before laying his head on the executioner's block. The battle-scarred warrior knew that his last days on earth had come (2. Tim. 4: 6). These, his last letters, are precious as revealing something of what he felt as he faced the mysterious transition which we call death.

When we review Paul's epistles as to their *chronology* and their prevailing *temperament*, they fall into three groups. (1) Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, Romans; probably 53—59 A.D. (2) Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians; probably in the year 63. (3) The Pastoral letters; about the year 66. Perhaps it is not inappropriate to call the first group the fresh, eager, *morning* epistles of the Apostle's missionary ministry. In the second group there is not only (as already mentioned) a shift of emphasis, the temperament suggests *afternoon* rather than morning. And now, in this third group, i.e. the Pastoral letters, we reach *evening*. It has been truly observed that although in these evening epistles we do not have the "wealth of argument", the "fire and vehemence" which we see in the earlier "great epistles of the legalist controversy", there is here a "rich sunset glow"; a "mellowed style", a "softer, calmer tone"; a reposeful confidence as the Apostle now finds, in deep experience, that the great evangelical doctrines for which he has fought and suffered are proving themselves the truths which give *solid comfort* in the prospect of death and the Beyond.

But so far as their message to ourselves is concerned, what is the *dominant* impression conveyed by these Pastoral Epistles? Who can help hearing the note of *concern* which sounds through them? Subtle peril is pending. There is an undertone of peculiar urgency. We sense, too, that these letters not only said something at the beginning of the Christian era; they are saying something to us now, as the age-end shadows gather around the Church on earth. May we have ears to hear what the Spirit saith to the pastors!

Their message will come to us more meaningfully if we carefully observe four features:—

1. Their location—or where they occur.
2. Their background—or what they reflect.
3. Their key-word—or what they enjoin.
4. Their outlook—or what they portend.

Their Location

As anyone can see, these Pastoral Epistles dovetail into the overall plan just where they belong. After the nine communications to *congregations* it is fitting that there should be these directives to *ministers*, or leaders of congregations. They are clearly intended to complete that one-and-only part of Holy Writ which is exclusively devoted to Christian believers as together comprising the Church mystical and universal, and as existing in local assemblies with memberships, elders, deacons, pastors.

Besides this, just as truly as the book of the Acts marks the transition from the “kingdom” message of the Gospels to the “Church” doctrine of the Epistles, so do these Pastoral Epistles, both by their position and their nature, mark the change-over from the special contribution of the nine Church Epistles, to the new emphasis and aspects in the ensuing nine *non-Church*, Christian Hebrew letters (Hebrews to Revelation).

Somehow, too, we get a curious impression that these Pastoral Epistles, by their very position at the end of the *Church* area in Scripture, have a subtle, latent reference to the end of the Church area in *history*, i.e. the end of the present age. More of this presently.

One thing of which these Pastoral Epistles may well remind us today is, that although the New Testament gives counsels and directions as to the organizing of local assemblies or “churches”, it nowhere even hints at any central board of administration such as those which have since developed and which exist with such wide powers today. Let the fond devotees of the present-day ecumenicity movement pay due attention to that fact. Such an elaborate hierarchical pyramid as the Roman Catholic system is utterly foreign to the New Testament. So, too, are *all* central executives which exercise a *governmental* control over combines of churches. There may well be voluntary associations of churches which do not infringe the autonomy of any; but there must be no governing executives (much less a “World Church” after the modern “ecumenicity” pattern!) for these, while seeming to accomplish a useful outward unity, almost invariably violate and often destroy that vital *inward* unity which comes of free and direct loyalty to the Apostolic Word.

Their Background

In Acts 19 we are told of the mighty impact made by Paul's two years in Ephesus, capital city of the old-time Asia and centre of Diana-worship, with a temple so magnificent that it was considered one of the seven wonders of the world. Under the shadow of that overawing temple, in the nearby school of Tyrannus, the little Jew, Paul, lectured daily for two years, and a mighty work of God's Spirit spread far and wide; so that (as verse 10 says) "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the Word, both Jews and Greeks". The large-scale opposition stirred up by Demetrius the silversmith bore witness to the widespread impact of the Gospel. It would appear that thousands were won and saved by the preaching of the Gospel. So many who practised magical arts publicly burned their superstitious books and apparatus that the estimated value was "fifty thousand pieces of silver" (19). "So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed." A few years later Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus the profoundest letter he ever wrote. But now compare these verses in Acts, Ephesians, and 2 Timothy.

Acts

"So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed" (20).
"Almost throughout all Asia this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods which are made with hands" (26).

Ephesians

"After I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you" (1: 15. 16).

"The churches of Asia salute you" (1. Cor. 16: 19).

2. Timothy

"This thou knowest that *ALL THEY WHICH ARE IN ASIA BE TURNED AWAY FROM ME*; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes" (1: 15).

Yes, there it is, so soon! "All they which are in Asia be turned away from me." This "*all*" in 2 Timothy is the sad follow-up of "*some*" in the first epistle—

“*Some* have turned aside” (1: 6)
“*Some* have made shipwreck” (1: 19)
“*Some* are turned after Satan” (5: 15)
“*Some* have been led astray” (6: 10)
“*Some* have missed the mark” (6: 21 marg.).

As G. G. Findlay remarks, these Pastoral Epistles “throw a striking light upon the progress of *heresy* in Paul’s later days.” The turning away was not merely personal (against Paul himself), it was theological and doctrinal; an apostasy from the *truth*. In his second Timothy letter Paul speaks of those (professed believers) who have “erred from the *truth*” (2: 18), and of others who “resist the *truth*” (3: 8), and of still others who “turn away from the *truth*” (4: 4). To the great-hearted Apostle this apostasy came as a deep sorrow. Yet it was not a surprise, for in his farewell to the Ephesian elders, years earlier, he had said,

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall *grievous wolves* enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, of *your own selves* shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to *draw away* disciples after them. Therefore watch. . . .”

(Acts 20: 28—30).

Thus clearly in advance did Paul expose the two sources of apostasy: (1) “wolves” from *outside*, (2) “perverters” from *inside*. He lived to see it happen.

Their Key-Note

But if that is what Paul saw as he looked *around*, it is also what he saw as he looked *ahead*. That is what stamps these Pastoral letters with their notable character and accentuated meaning for today. Threaded through them is the recurrent insistence on “guarding a deposit” or sacred trust. It is

rather clearer in the Greek than in our English translation. Note the following verses, particularly the word, “deposit”, in them.

“The glorious Gospel of the blessed God, which was *ENTRUSTED* to me.” 1. Tim. 1: 11.

“This charge I *DEPOSIT* with thee, my son, Timothy.”
—1: 18.

“I charge thee . . . *GUARD* these things without prejudice.”
—5: 21.

“O Timothy, guard the *DEPOSIT*”—6: 20, A.S.V. margin.

“I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that *HE* is able to *guard the DEPOSIT*.”—2. Tim. 1: 12.

“The good *DEPOSIT* do thou *GUARD* through the Holy Spirit which dwelleth in us.”—1: 14.

“The things which thou hast heard from me . . . *DEPOSIT* with faithful men.”—2: 2.

“The message which was *ENTRUSTED* to me, according to the commandment of God our Saviour.”—Titus 1: 3.

In connection with the “*guarding*” of this deposit (1. Tim. 6: 14, 20, 2. Tim. 1: 12, 14), note the recurring of the word, “charge”.

- | | | |
|------------|-------|---|
| 1. Timothy | 1: 3 | “ <i>Charge</i> some that they teach no other doctrine.” |
| „ | 1: 5 | “Now the end [or aim] of the <i>charge</i> is love out of a pure heart.” |
| „ | 1: 18 | “This <i>charge</i> I commit unto thee, son Timothy . . .” |
| „ | 4: 11 | “These things <i>charge</i> and teach.” |
| „ | 5:7 | “These things also <i>charge</i> , that they may be blameless.” |
| „ | 5: 2 | “I <i>charge</i> [or solemnly testify] thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels.” |

- „ 6: “I *charge* thee in the sight of God who
13 quickeneth all things.”
- „ 6: “*Charge* them that are rich . . . that they be not
17 high minded.”
2. Timothy 4: 1 “I *charge* [or solemnly testify] thee in the sight
of God and of Christ Jesus.”

I will not go further into this here, as it is dealt with more fully in volume 6 of my *Explore the Book*: but note that whereas First Timothy is a “charge”, Second Timothy is a *challenge*: “Stir up”, “Be not ashamed”, “endure”, “remember”, “charge”, “study”, “shun”, “refuse”, “continue”, “preach the Word”, “do the work of an evangelist”.

Note further that whereas in the two Timothy letters the urgent stress all through is upon defending evangelical *doctrine*, in Titus it is on maintaining truly Christian *conduct*. To quote all the verses referring to this would be to quote practically the whole Titus letter. The key-verse is chapter 3: 8, “This is a faithful saying . . . that they which have believed in God might be careful to *MAINTAIN GOOD WORKS*”. As everywhere else in the New Testament epistles, so here, with even firmer insistence, Christian *doctrine* must be “adorned” by Christian *practice*.

So, then, the vital “deposit” is “*THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL*”. First Timothy charges us to *protect* it. Second Timothy challenges us to *proclaim* it. The letter to Titus cautions us to *practice* it. The three together are a final, new, Pauline rally-cry to the holy war. We know Whom we have believed, and are persuaded that He is able to “guard the deposit” until “that day”; nevertheless the soul-saving operation of that “glorious Gospel” is imperilled by insurgent false philosophies from without and by insidious deviations within. Error spreads. Souls are at stake. Time is short. The issues are eternal! These three letters cry, “Men of Israel, help!” “Wanted, true soldiers of Jesus Christ!” As there is but the “one Mediator between God and men”, so there is only the one Gospel which truly saves. In the face of age-end error and compromise we are challenged with new urgency to *defend* it, to *declare* it, and to *live* it.

Their Outlook

Unmistakably these last letters of Paul have an *age-end* outlook. See again the first to Timothy, chapter 4: 1 and onwards: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits. . . .” See in the second letter, chapter 3: 1 and onwards: “This know, also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy . . . having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. . . . Evil men and seducers [or juggling imposters] shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. . . .” This intimation of foul weather ahead colours much else in these Pastoral counsels.

Remember: it is a divinely inspired penman who writes these paragraphs. We do not claim inspiration for all that Paul *thought*, but we do claim inspiration for all that he *taught* in his epistles. As for what Paul *thought*, we get the impression that he viewed the “last days” and the Lord’s return as fairly near at hand, not in the least suspecting that he was describing an end-of-the-age scene twenty centuries distant. That, however, only makes his delineation the more arresting.

In a series of studies like this, in which we are concerned only with big, broad meanings, we cannot go into expository details; but (we may well ask) could there have been given to us, in such a few bold, vivid strokes, a more fitting expose of leading present-day characteristics than these Timothy letters contain? All through the centuries the organized Church has had recurrent troubles from foes without and misguided perverters within; but today, when (unless we are strangely mistaken) the precursory signs of our Lord’s return are *really* evident, Christendom is beset by a development more ominous than anything ever before. Its proper name is *APOSTASY*.

Our flyleaf quotation preceding this chapter correctly points out that apostasy differs from error (which may spring from ignorance) and even from heresy (which may result from Satanic beguilement). Apostasy is a departure from the fundamental truths of the Christian faith, but accompanied by a continuing *profession* of the Christian faith. Today there is an apostasy such as there has never been before. In former centuries different doctrines of the Faith have been doubted, denied, perverted, distorted, but the inspired Scriptures have always been there as the infallible court of final appeal. Thus, despite mighty onslaughts of falsehood from

outside the Church, and fearful heresies from inside, the “faith once-for-all delivered to the saints” has survived. But these last hundred years or so, and especially the last eighty, have dealt Satan’s *masterstroke*. Under the impressive guise of new and supposedly more scientific Christian scholarship, *the Bible itself* has been impugned and desupernaturalized by a rationalistic criticism which has destroyed the divine authority of the Bible for hundreds of millions. It is the most gigantic betrayal of the Bible anyone could ever have conceived. It has undermined the moral and spiritual authority of the Protestant pulpit. It has pitifully reduced the influence of organized Christianity in social and industrial and political areas. It has opened the way for evolutionary philosophy and a widespread non-Christian psychology. It has contributed more than any other single factor to a veritable landslide in morals. All over Christendom it has diminished attendances at Christian sanctuaries, and in many parts has eventually closed them. It has drained away all real Gospel preaching and Bible teaching from thousands of pulpits and churches. It has given rise to the “social gospel”, to a “World Council of Churches”, and an ecumenicity drive which includes all kinds of so-called “Christian” denials of basic, vital, Christian truth.

Yes, it has come. It is here. It is without historical precedent. Taken with other developments, it is one big, tragic sign that the age-end time is upon us, as pre-delineated by Paul.

What are the true servants of the Lord to do? The answer is given in these Pastoral Epistles. We might fill pages expounding their Apostolic counsels; but they are there, and they “speak for themselves” to every open-minded reader. First, in 1 Timothy, comes the charge: “*GUARD THE DEPOSIT*”. Then, in 2 Timothy, comes the challenge: “*PREACH THE WORD*”. Then, in Titus, comes the final caution: “*ADORN THE DOCTRINE*”.

God help us to be faithful! Let men call us narrow-minded, out-of-date, stick-in-the-mud, uncooperatives, or whatever they will. Let us remain true to the Scriptures as the very Word of God, and to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as it is clearly taught in those Scriptures, and to our glorious Saviour-King Himself whom soon we must see! Let there be no compromise either in doctrine or in practice. Amid many lowered standards, let us lift the standard of evangelical truth higher than ever. We

can be firm without being fierce. We can be true without being bigots. We can love all men without denying the truth for any.

“Guard”! “Preach”! “Adorn”! Was not Paul thinking of these in his martyrdom cry: “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have guarded the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge [in contrast with Nero, the unrighteous judge] shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all them that have loved His appearing”.

Mark carefully those three metaphors of the Christian life: a fight, a race, a trust. It is a fight, for there is a foe to quell. It is a race, for there is a goal to reach. It is a trust, for there is a truth to guard.

It is a fight: God make us *brave*! It is a race: God keep us *keen*! It is a trust: God keep us *true*!

It is a fight: we are to be “*strong* in the Lord”. It is a race: we are to “run with *patience*”. It is a trust: we are to be “*faithful* unto death”.

It is a fight; and there is a palm of victory for the overcomer. It is a race; and there is the prize of the high calling for those who endure. It is a trust; and there is the Master’s “Well done!” for the faithful steward.

See the royal monster, Nero, as he sits in fantastic glamour, the emperor of the world! The porticoes of his palace are a mile long. The palace walls are mother-of-pearl and ivory; and the ceilings are made so as to shower rich perfumes upon his guests. His crown alone is worth nearly a million dollars in present American currency. His mules are shod with silver. He fishes with hooks of gold. A thousand carriages attend him when he travels; His wardrobe is so lavish, he never wears an article of attire twice. Grandeur, affluence, opulence, voluptuous gratifications, are his such as only a very few men in history have known. Is he happy? On the contrary, he is a sadistic wretch who murders members of his own family, and finishes his own life on earth by suicide.

And now see Paul, in his dark, lonely prison. Scars on his face, lash-lines on his body, and other “brands of Jesus” upon him tell their own story of sufferings. Manacles clank on his wrists. A chain binds him to a Roman guard. He knows that even now the executioner is preparing the block and the axe. Yet he writes from that cell, “I have learned in whatsoever state I am, to be content”. “The Lord stood by me”. “I know whom I have

believed”. “I am now ready to be offered”. “Henceforth there is laid up for me the *CROWN!*” All is peace, joy, confidence, hope, and radiant assurance, in an unspeakably dear and closely present *SAVIOUR*. Welcome, martyrdom! The swift axe will cleave the way to sudden, endless *glory!*

THE “CHRISTIAN HEBREW” EPISTLES

ABOUT THE HEBREWS EPISTLE

This “word of exhortation” was written under the shadow of the doom of national Judaism. The signs which our Lord had given in his prophecies of judgment were being fulfilled; and “the day” was visibly approaching which He foretold (ch. 10: 25). The “forty years” of respite (30—70 A.D.) granted to unbelieving Israel, had nearly expired (ch. 3: 7–19). A “shaking” was going on in the powers of earth and heaven, amongst all the civil and religious institutions of the nation, which portended their speedy removal (ch. 12: 26–29). . . . For a generation Judaism and Christianity, the old covenant and the new, had subsisted side by side [in Judea]; but this could be no longer. “He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second” (ch. 10: 9). The supreme crisis had come for these Jewish Christians. They had clung to the ancient fold, and in their zeal for the law (Acts 21: 20) had strained their loyalty to Jesus Christ almost to the breaking point. Now they must choose between the two camps. Either they will follow their High Priest “without the gate, bearing” from their Jewish kinsmen “His reproach”; or they must take sides with His enemies and crucifiers, and remain within the gate of Jerusalem, awaiting the judgment of which “a fearful expectation” filled every thoughtful Hebrew mind (ch. 10: 27, 37–39). This, they must understand, would be to “draw back unto perdition”. The siege and fall of Jerusalem verified the warning in full measure.

G. G. Findlay.

THE “CHRISTIAN HEBREW” EPISTLES

WE here reach the final group of writings in our New Testament. There are nine of them.

Hebrews	1 John
James	2 John
1 Peter	3 John
2 Peter	Jude
Revelation	

These are often called the “Catholic” epistles, or the “General” epistles, mainly because they are not addressed to Christian churches or groups of churches, or to Christian pastors, as are the preceding thirteen letters from the pen of Paul. But neither of those two designations for them is accurate. Only three out of the nine (2 Peter, 1 John, and Jude) are “general”, in the sense of not being addressed to some local or specific group of recipients. Nor are they any more “catholic” than the nine Christian Church Epistles with their world-wide Gospel and supra-national doctrine of the *Ecclesia*. Indeed, some of these further nine are *less* “catholic” (Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Revelation) in their approach and outreach.

It is preferable to call them either the *Non-Church* Epistles (in contradistinction to the nine Church Epistles), or the *Christian Hebrew* Epistles (in distinguishment from the Gentile emphasis of the Pauline epistles). There is nothing in any of them about the Church mystical, or universal, or collective. Nor is any of them addressed to a local Christian church. The only mention of local assemblies is in Revelation 2 and 3, where we have the seven one-paragraph letters to the “seven churches in Asia”.

As mentioned at an earlier stage of these studies, in all these nine epistles, either the address is directly Jewish, or the standpoint is noticeably so. We are right, therefore, to call them the “Christian Hebrew Epistles”.

Furthermore, our naming them as such is a reminder as to why they properly occur *last* in our New Testament. The *supreme* message of the New Testament is the world-wide Gospel of divine grace to all men, accompanied by the now-revealed truth of the “mystery”: the Church. Obviously, that Gospel must be expounded *first*. But once it *is* proclaimed and propagated, the big question arises: What is its relation to the covenant people, Israel? These nine Christian Hebrew writings are an answer to that question.

Since the new Christian movement has all its antecedents in the covenant nation, and its very roots in the inspired Hebrew Scriptures, there arises a big necessity to explain, adequately and permanently, its relationship to *Judaism*, the Jewish religious faith based upon those Scriptures. This was (and still is) the more necessary because the One being proclaimed “to all nations” as the “Saviour of the world” claimed to be Israel’s awaited Messiah, Son of Abraham, Son of David, and the divinely predestined Heir to the theocratic throne.

It was (and still is) sensitively important to explain the message of the Gospel in relation to the Sinaitic contract between Jehovah and Israel through Moses; to explain Messiah-Jesus and His Calvary self-sacrifice in relation to the Aaronic priesthood and the Levitical sacrifices. All that is dealt with in the dissertation which we call the Epistle to the Hebrews. Equally pressing was the need for some clarifying comment on the relation of “works” to the new principle of justification by faith; and on the new Christian *hope* which had now superseded the merely *Jewish* Messianic hope; and on the new way of fellowship with the one great heavenly Father through union with the Son. All this we have in the James and Peter and John Epistles. And, completively, it was obviously fitting, since the purely Jewish forward look to a future Messianic age had become merged in an even bigger, wider, grander prospect, that there should be given to all men the eschatological *apocalypse*, or unveiling of the future, in relation to Israel and all mankind, which we have in the last book of our New Testament.

Yes, those are the reasons why these nine Christian Hebrew writings come where they do in the providential preservation and formation of the sacred Canon.

To demarcate the group and sub-group formation of the New Testament epistles gives us to see more easily the forward march of the divine *purpose* which moves through them. So, let that onward movement be indicated just once again here. It was necessary, first, that the Gospel of *salvation* should be elucidated (and this we have in Romans to Galatians); then that the meaning of the *Church* should be explained (and this we have in Ephesians to Colossians); then that the Christian *hope* should be declared (and this we have in 1 & 2 Thessalonians); then that counsels should be given to local church leaders or *pastors* (and this we have in the Pastoral Epistles); then that the relation of it all to the Jews and Judaism should be explicated—particularly its relation to Moses, the priesthood, the sacrifices, “works”, the Messianic hope (and this we have in Hebrews to Revelation).

The Hebrews Epistle

Some years ago, in a pleasant conversation about favourite Epistles, a person of no mean intelligence remarked, “I cannot say that Hebrews is a favourite of mine. It goes into a lot of Old Testament details, and somehow it reads like an impressive build-up; yet I cannot get the point of it; and there are those disturbing passages about the impossibility of ever being restored if we fall from grace.” By the generality of readers Hebrews is perhaps the least correctly apprehended of all the New Testament epistles. That is because of failure to appreciate (1) the class of *persons* to whom it is written, (2) the particular *purpose* it has in view.

We touched on this in our reconsideration of the Acts, but it calls for further mention here. Recall, again, how when Paul reached Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 21, James and the Elders said to him (evidently with considerable apprehensiveness), “Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which have believed; and they are all *zealous of the Law*” (20). As the context makes very plain, “zealous of the Law” means that they had not turned from Moses to Jesus in the sense of trusting on Jesus *solely* for “justification by faith” through His all-sufficient atonement. They had become persuaded (through the miracles and witness of the Apostles) that Jesus was the Messiah, and that if a sufficient number in the nation believed on Him as such, and repented toward God, and devoutly kept the Law,

Jesus would soon return from heaven and set up the Messianic kingdom with Israel as its centre.

Doubtless there *were* those who already believed in the deeper, regenerating way; but so far as a large majority were concerned, faith had not penetrated to that crisis-point of the soul. They were still in the domain of responding to convincing “signs and wonders”; sincerely rejoicing in the resurrection of Jesus, and in forgiveness of sins through baptism into His Name; yet they had not clearly grasped, as yet, the absolute necessity and all-sufficiency of our Lord’s death as the one offering for sin, making all the Aaronic sacrifices and ceremonies obsolete. Apparently, without any sense of incompatibility they were still very Jewish and legalistic, zealous to keep the Law, and to observe the “customs” (21) and to maintain the Temple priesthood (6: 7) and to perpetuate the usual sacrifices (21: 26).

With those considerations in mind, think again of the vast crowd which attempted to lynch Paul. Those “many thousands” who believed on Jesus but were very “zealous of the Law” *must* have been mixed in with those other devoutly religious Jews when the outflaming of hate against Paul was ignited. Not a word is written to separate those “thousands” of Jewish “believers” as non-participants with the incensed crowd intent on trampling Paul to death. We cannot infer *too* much from what the narrative does *not* say; yet it speaks loudly that (as it would seem) not one voice of protest was heard from those “thousands” of “believers”.

Get that Palestinian background vividly in mind. Then try to live in the excruciating mental distress of those sincere but only part-way “believers” on Jesus when a little later the Israel nation as a whole finally repudiated Jesus, and, in the name of that venerated religion which was founded on the Mosaic Law and the Hebrew Prophets, Israel’s religious leaders denounced the Nazarene as a blaspheming deceiver.

The sky suddenly changes. The Jesus cultus has become officially declared as intolerable *heresy*. Association with it involves ostracism, social rejection, family misunderstanding, and, maybe, legal penalties. “Believing” on Jesus is now an acutely costly thing, carrying with it the heart-rending necessity of fundamental choice. No longer can it be Jesus *and* Judaism. It must be Jesus *or* Judaism. What the painful perplexities and costly issues of that choice must have been for thousands of those devoutly

Mosaic Jewish “believers” on Jesus, no words of ours could express. Either way, it cost that which was deepest and dearest to one’s very soul.

They were the persons specially addressed in this Epistle to the Hebrews. And the main *purpose* of the epistle is threefold. (1) To show them how Jesus *fulfils* the Old Testament sacrifices and prophecies; (2) To warn them, with tender concern, that having “tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come” (as many of them had, in the miraculous moving of the Holy Spirit among them), if they should now turn away, knowingly identifying themselves with the Lord’s murderers and closing their hearts to the Holy Spirit by renouncing their own repentance, they would become self-excluded from further renewal, since there “remaineth no more sacrifice for sins”. (3) To urge them to “go on” with the now despised Jesus—“Let us go forth, therefore, unto Him *outside the camp*, bearing His reproach; for here we have no continuing city” (13: 13, 14).

So, then, this Epistle is *not* written to born-again *Gentile* Christians, but to those long-ago Jewish “believers” who had *not yet broken with Judaism*. It tells them, in effect, that if they now turn back from Jesus and the Holy Spirit’s unmistakable witness to Him, they will be like those “ten spies”, away back at Kadeshbarnea (Num. 13) who actually looked inside Canaan, and “tasted” its first-ripe grapes, yet afterwards turned away and *irrecoverably* perished.

If, then, this Epistle to the *Hebrews* is written, as its title and opening verses plainly say, to *Jews* of that abnormal interval, as described in the Acts of the Apostles, why do we persist in applying passages like Hebrews 6 and 10 to born-again *Gentile* Christians? Why do we keep playing off Hebrews 6 and 10 against Romans 8: 38, 39? Dear Christian, do not let your faith in Romans 8: 38, 39, with its divine pledge of your *eternal security* in Christ be shaken by passages which were written, not to you, but to *Jews* of a long gone abnormal interval, warning them of *their* insecurity while trying to hold on to Jesus with one hand and to Judaism with the other!

In case any reader of these pages should still doubt the verity of what we are saying of that abnormal suspense-period covered by the Acts of the Apostles, let me refer for confirmation to two acknowledged scholars on the matter, (1) Read carefully Dr. G. G. Findlay’s comment given on the flyleaf

of this chapter. (2) See the subscript to this chapter, giving a quotation from Bishop Westcott's *The Bible in the Church*.

Applications To Ourselves

But if this Hebrews epistle is written specially to *them*, does it have no teaching or application for us Christian believers today? Indeed it does, and most vitally so. Not only in the case of this Hebrews epistle, but elsewhere too in Scripture, we need to distinguish between what is written *FOR* us and what is written *TO* us. This epistle was *not* written specifically “to” us, who are regenerated members of the one true Church, in which there is “neither Jew nor Gentile”, but all are “one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3: 28); yet like all other parts of Holy Scripture it is written *for* us—“for our learning” (Rom. 15: 4). We must distinguish between its strict *interpretation* and its legitimate *application*. Truly has it been said that in *every* part of the Bible the “interpretation” is *one*; the “applications” may be many.

Let me illustrate. A certain father handed a letter to his eldest son. “This is for you,” he said. “I want you to read it carefully. It has cost me much to write it.” Seeing the sad look on his father’s face, the son began to read the letter anxiously and quickly. Soon he came across statements which hurt him. His heart sank. “Is *that* what my father thinks about me?” Then came certain cutting allegations which he knew were simply not true of him, and puzzling sentences which apparently contradicted promises which his father had most clearly made to him. Scarcely believing his eyes, he quickly turned back to re-read the letter, and only then noticed that it was not addressed to “Henry” (himself) but to “Hervey” (a cousin). The father had simply wanted Henry to read it and comment on it before it was mailed. So, it was not written to him, but it was certainly meant *for* him, because along with its other contents there were disclosures concerning the father’s will, not to mention further matters, all of which involved Henry as well as Hervey.

Even so is it with this mighty missive to the “Hebrews”, group-leader of the nine Christian Hebrew Epistles. It is one of the greatest two epistles in our New Testament, the other being Romans, group-leader of the nine Christian Church Epistles. Although it is not written *to* us (as regenerate members of the neither-Jewish-nor-Gentile but *Christian Church*), how

much it has *for* us! Much of it indirectly involves us. Even more of it directly concerns us. And all of it is meant to teach us some great truth or another. For instance, to mention only three features in it. First, it is the only place in the New Testament where we have a full-scale treatment of our Lord's high priestly ministry in heaven. Second, it is unique in its wonderful contribution on the eternal finality of our Lord Jesus as Sinbearer, High Priest, and Sanctifier of His people. Third, it is classic on the *modus operandi* of faith. As with Hebrews, so it is, in one way or another, with *all* these nine Christian Hebrew writings.

For a maximum appreciation of these nine, we need first to see the contrastive marks between the two group-leader epistles, Romans and Hebrews. At the beginning of the nine Christian Church Epistles, Romans overrides national distinctions, addressing Jew and Gentile alike. At the beginning of the nine Christian Hebrew Epistles, the address is to Jews as distinct from all others. Corresponding with this, Romans proclaims that salvation through our Lord Jesus is the *only* way. Hebrews teaches that salvation through our Lord Jesus is the *better* way: He is the "better" Deliverer, the "better" sacrifice, the "better" Priest; and faith is the "better" principle. Romans begins with "THE GOSPEL OF GOD" (1: 1), God's new word to "*all* nations" (1: 5). Hebrews begins with THE "SON" OF GOD (1: 1, 2), God's final word to the *Jewish* nation. Romans explains the relation of the Gospel to Israel *dispensationally* (9—11). Hebrews explains the relation of the Gospel to Judaism *theologically*.

Romans presents the Atonement as God's mighty deliverance for all who will receive it (1: 16). Hebrews presents the Atonement especially in its benefits to those who are already redeemed and in covenant relationship with God. Therefore, in all that it says about the Pentateuchal sacrifices, the Hebrew epistle never once mentions the *Passover* lamb. Its object is to show how already-redeemed sinners may be confirmed as "holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling" (3: 1) in their participation of covenant privileges.

The key words to the epistle are, "better" and "perfect". Its focal passage is chapter 10: 19-22. Its three movements are:

1. Jesus, the new and "better" Deliverer (1-7)
2. Calvary, the new and "better" Covenant (8-10: 18)

3. Faith, the true and “better” principle (10: 19-13)

For a more detailed presentation of this, perhaps I may be allowed to refer again to volume 6 of my *Explore the Book*. There is a never-ending fascination, of course, about that emphasis on “*better*”, in this epistle. Our Lord is

Better than angels	(1, 2)
Better than Moses	(3)
Better than Joshua	(4: 1-13)
Better than Aaron	(4: 14-7)

The Cross brings us the

Better hope	(7: 19)
Better covenant	(7: 22)
Better promises	(8: 6)
Better sacrifice	(9: 23)
Better possessions	(10: 34)
Better country	(11: 16)
Better resurrection	(11: 35)
Better provision	(11: 40)

Is it to be wondered at, that with all these “better” privileges come bigger responsibilities? Hebrews is distinctively an epistle of solemn urgings:

“Let us fear”	(4: 1)
“Let us labour”	(4: 11)
“Let us hold fast”	(4: 14)
“Let us come boldly”	(4: 16)
“Let us press on”	(6: 1)
“Let us draw near”	(10: 22)

“Let us consider”	(10: 24)
“Let us lay aside”	(12: 1)
“Let us run”	(12: 1)
“Let us have grace”	(12: 28)
“Let us go forth”	(13: 13)
“Let us offer”	(13: 15)

What solemn meaning would those old-time Jewish “believers” see in the exhortation, “Let us go forth, therefore, unto Him *without the camp*, bearing His reproach”? They would at once think of the golden calf episode. Under the guise of still worshipping Jehovah, and with the connivance of high priest Aaron, the camp of Israel had apostatised from the *real* Jehovah religion and was *disobeying* Him, brazenly breaking the second of the Ten Commandments! After discovering this fearful breach of covenant by the people, Moses left them and pitched a tent “outside the camp” (Ex. 33: 7) as Jehovah’s *true* “tabernacle”. All who repented with godly sorrow went to him there—“outside the camp”. And now again, centuries later, it is the *religious* leadership of Israel which, in the very *name* of the Jehovah religion, had crucified the incarnate Son of God! As Jehovah had left that “camp” of Israel at the golden calf incident (Ex. 33: 9, A.S.V.), so was it now again happening! The real “tent” of Jehovah was “outside the camp” with the reproached Jesus. No longer for those Jewish “believers” could Jerusalem be the centre *city* of the “camp”. *That* city was now to be left “desolate” in fulfilment of the Saviour’s tears (Luke 13: 34, 35). “Here we [Christians] have no continuing city, but we seek one which is to come” (Heb. 13: 14).

But if the *interpretation* of these words about the “camp” belongs in particular to those first-century Jewish “believers”, is there any application to ourselves today? Assuredly there is (and what is true in this instance is true again and again throughout the epistle). Take the following excellent excerpt from Dr. Andrew Murray.

“To understand this [‘going outside the camp’] aright, let us look at the two distinguishing features of the sin-offering on the Day of Atonement. The blood was brought *into the Holy Place*; but

the body was burnt *outside the camp*. Even so Christ's blood was brought into heaven, and is the power of our entrance and our abode there: the sign that *that* is our place. So the call comes: *Let us draw nigh, let us enter*. But Christ's body was taken *without* the camp: the sign that *that* is our place too. Heaven has received Him and us in Him: we belong *there*. The world has cast Him without the camp, and us with Him: we belong *there*. In heaven we share His honour; on earth His reproach. Let us therefore go forth unto Him, without the camp, bearing His reproach."

And to what does all this varied progress of teaching lead, in this mighty epistle? It leads to this, in its final paragraph:—

"Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Perfect you in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ: to Whom be glory unto the ages of the ages. Amen."

What a finale! Mark the six gracious wonders in it—

1. A reconciled God—"now the God of peace".
2. A risen Saviour—"Who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus".
3. A constant Shepherd—"that great Shepherd of the sheep".
4. An everlasting covenant—"through the blood of the everlasting covenant".
5. An inwrought sanctification—"perfect you in every good work to do His will, working *in you* . . ."
6. A grateful doxology—"to Whom be glory unto the ages of the ages".

Once and for all the debt was paid;
On Jesus all my guilt was laid!
Then He arose from out the grave,
And ever lives my soul to save!
His hand has broken all my chains,
And in my heart as King He reigns.

Glory to Him, the Lamb once slain,
For now through Him to die is gain;
Once, on this earth, did He atone,
The starry orbs are now His throne:
Ye myriad worlds, break into song,
And evermore His praise prolong!

This is my song: He set me free!
His grateful slave I now would be,
Counting it joy if, for His Name,
I suffer stigma, brands, or shame;
Until, with yonder heavenly throng,
I sing His praise in endless song!

SUBSCRIPT ON JEWISH CHRISTIANS DURING THE PERIOD COVERED BY THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Bishop B. F. Westcott writes: "In its primitive form the Apostolic Church was simply a congregation of Jews, who added to the observance of the Law a belief in Jesus as the Messiah, with the immediate hope of a *restitution of all things*. In this stage there was no idea of the abrogation of the Law before the Second Coming of Christ. The Hellenist Stephen first proclaimed the *change of the customs which Moses delivered*, and the storm which followed on his teaching sufficiently shows the novelty of its form. Afterwards, when a mightier Stephen was already prepared in the person of 'Saul the persecutor,' the full privileges of the Church were extended to 'devout' Gentiles, of whom Cornelius was the type, yet not without misgivings and opposition from those that *were of the circumcision*. The same opposition was repeated with greater violence, when, through the preaching of St. Paul, God *had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles*. . . . Yet another step remained. The Jews hitherto had held to their Law by common consent. Jerusalem was still the seat of the Twelve: the Temple was their habitual place of worship: the national Festivals were still hallowed by their observance. St. Paul conformed in practice to the customs of his countrymen, but after a little experience in his Divine work, he declared that the keeping of the Ceremonial Law was a matter of

indifference even to Jewish converts. This was the last struggle, and the *Epistle to the Galatians* bears witness to the fierceness with which it was contested. Perhaps we may say that the issue would have been doubtful but for the fall of Jerusalem and the abolition of the Temple service, which ratified by an awful judgement the perfect liberty of the Christian Church.”

The Bible in the Church, pp. 62, 63.

There is infinitely solemn reason for the urgency with which the Hebrews epistle exhorts those Jewish Christians of the Acts period to go all the way in their believing on Jesus—even to their going “without the camp, bearing His reproach.” The writer knew that if they now fell back it could not be merely to neutrality; it must be to side with the Judaism which was repudiating and defaming Jesus with relentless hatred. Indeed, as the epistle says, in *their* case, because of the *peculiar choice* which they must make, it would be in effect to “crucify the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame” (6: 6). If there was one thing more than another which would slam the door against any further “renewal unto repentance” (6: 6) it was this deliberate re-crucifying of Jesus, for it was a publicly shaming Him whose death on the Cross had formerly *called forth* their professed repentance.

As for those believers who determined to hold to our Lord *and* Judaism, in the end they actually *did* degenerate into *adversaries* of the true Christian faith, as a further quotation from Bishop Westcott will substantiate. He says: “The oldest, and for some time the most powerful section in the apostolic church was that of *Jews zealous for the Law*, who still retained their earliest form of Christian belief [i.e. without making a clean break with Judaism] and thus fell gradually more and more into the position of *adversaries* to the true faith. Their distinguishing characteristic was Legalism, and as they began by regarding the Lord as a Teacher, so they naturally lost in the course of time those higher views of His person and work which were unfolded by St. Paul and St. John”. Their successors continued for some time; and, as Bishop Westcott adds, “Under the name of *Cerinthians* and *Ebionites* they continued to exist as separate societies after the close of the apostolic age; but their real power ceased with the destruction of the Temple, and they remained isolated and purposeless, like fragments of an earlier system left standing in a new world”.

THE FINAL PEAK IN THE LANDSCAPE

NOT FOR ONE GLIMPSE, BUT FOREVER,
FOREVER AT HOME WITH THEE:
AT HOME IN THAT BEAUTIFUL PALACE,
AT HOME BY THE CRYSTAL SEA:
YET IN ALL THAT WONDERFUL HEAVEN
CAN ANYTHING EVER EFFACE,
OR OUTSHINE THAT RAPTUROUS MOMENT—
THE FIRST, FIRST SIGHT OF HIS FACE?

THE FINAL PEAK IN THE LANDSCAPE

WITH the Apocalypse, or “Revelation”, we reach the last high peak in the New Testament landscape. Before we consider it by itself, it is good at this point to look back and see it in relation to the whole, orderly development from Matthew onwards.

The Gospels present an incomparable *portrait*. The Acts outlines a world-wide *program*. The Epistles expound a transcendent *purpose*. The Apocalypse unveils an ultimate *prospect*.

In the Gospels we see the Person on whom we are to *believe*. In the Acts we learn the project which we are to *serve*. In the Epistles we find the truth which transforms the *character*. In the Apocalypse we see the rewards which crown the *overcomer*.

We may liken the four Gospels to a photograph album; and the Acts to leaves from a diary; and the Epistles to three sheaves of letters; and the Apocalypse to a vista from an upper window.

In the Gospels we have basic *facts*; in the Acts, outlined *aims*; in the Epistles, doctrinal *truths*; in the Apocalypse, unveiled *goals*.

The Threefold Movement

See again the triform pattern which, by evident intention and supervision, develops through the New Testament: (1) *historic*—Gospels and Acts; (2) *didactic*—the Epistles; (3) *prophetic*—the Apocalypse. The Gospels are the *foundation*; the Epistles are the *edifice*; the Apocalypse is the *capstone*. In the Gospels our Lord Jesus is the anointed *Prophet*—teaching us. In the Acts and the Epistles He is the ascended *Priest*—interceding for us. In the Apocalypse He is the returned King—reigning over us.

In these three main areas of the New Testament we have the three *tenses* of our Christian faith: in the Gospels and Acts, the *past*; in the Epistles, the *present*; in the Apocalypse, the *future*. In the Gospels He comes *to* us, and

dies *for* us. In the Acts and Epistles He lives *in* us, and works *through* us. In the Apocalypse He is back *with* us, and forever *among* us.

In the four Gospels we see the “Jesus of history” on whom we Christians *build*. In the Acts and Epistles we see the “Christ of experience” in whom we Christians are *one*. In the Apocalypse we see the Lamb-Lion King with whom we Christians are yet to *reign*.

Pattern in the Parts

Going with this overall plan of distribution, we find pattern and progress in *each* of the parts. Look back again at the wonderful Jesus who walks before us in those four Gospels. In Matthew He fulfils the past. In Mark He commands the present. In Luke He sublimates the human. In John He manifests the Divine.

As the inscription, *JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS*, was written above His cross in three languages—Hebrew and Greek and Latin (Roman), representing the three leading races of mankind, so is our Lord presented in the three synoptists, Matthew, Mark, Luke. As we have earlier emphasized, in Matthew His “inscription”, so to speak, is written in Hebrew—especially for the Jew. In Mark the inscription is written in dynamic *activity*—evidently with a first appeal to the Roman. In Luke there is a smoother lettering with a wonderfully flexible appeal to the Gentile (or “Greek”). But when Hebrew and Roman and Greek have *believed* on this virgin-born, Calvary-crucified, bodily-risen Saviour, they are no longer merely Hebrew or Roman or Greek: they are “*Christians*”; so, following the three synoptists, comes John—the Gospel in which all mere “nationalities” are completely submerged in the infinite divine love for every precious “whosoever” in the whole “world”.

The Epistles

Glance now again at the New Testament Epistles. Note again that all the epistles written to *Gentile* believers are grouped together (Romans to Thessalonians); then those to individual *pastors* (1 Timothy to Philemon); then those which are addressed to, or primarily intended for, *Hebrew* believers (Hebrews to Revelation).

Be reminded again of the correspondence between the ninefold *Gentile* group and the ninefold *Hebrew* group. Both groups begin with a major doctrinal treatise—in the one case, *Romans*; in the other, *Hebrews*. Both groups end with an “apocalypse”, or unveiling of the future—in the one case, *Thessalonians*, in the other, our Book of the Revelation. At the end of the first group, the Thessalonian letters show us the second coming of our Lord in relation to the *Church*. At the end of the second group, the Apocalypse unveils His second coming in its bearings on *Israel* and the *nations*.

All the way through both groups there is unmistakable order of emphasis and advance. We cannot here set this out in detail; but take the nine Church Epistles again. First we are meant to know God’s way of salvation for man. So, in *Romans*, most definitely, salvation is not by the *Law* (answer to the moralist). In *Corinthians*, it is not by *culture* (answer to the *idealist*). In *Galatians* it is not by “*observances*” (answer to the *ritualist*).

Next comes the revelation of the *Church* (*Ephesians* to *Philippians*), and the three main aspects of the three epistles, respectively, is too clear to miss: (1) *Ephesians*—the *mystical* aspect; (2) *Philippians*—the *practical* aspect; (3) *Colossians*—the *theological* aspect. Going with these three aspects are the three respective *accents*! in *Ephesians* it is on *unity*; in *Philippians* it is on *harmony*; in *Colossians* it is on *sanctity*. These differences of aspect and accent are there only in *degree*, but they are there in sufficient degree to stamp upon each epistle its own distinct character.

Finally comes the Church’s glorious *hope*: the second coming of Christ (1 & 2 *Thessalonians*). The first of the two Thessalonian letters emphasizes the translation of believers *collectively*—those from earth and those from heaven reunited and raptured “together”. The second letter emphasizes it as the consolation of believers *individually*—“rest” to the “troubled” saint, and “vengeance in flaming fire” on the troublers. In the first letter the Lord’s return puts the crown on *sanctification* (5: 23, 24). In the second letter it puts an end to all *persecution* (1: 5–10).

The On-moving Drama

And now, as we come to this last “book” of our Bible, glance again over the salient points in the on-moving drama.

1. Our Lord appears, preaching and offering the long-promised “*kingdom of heaven*” to the Jewish people. (Matt. 4).
2. With the rejection of that kingdom in Galilee comes the new emphasis: *Jesus Himself* and personal discipleship. (Matt. 11: 20, 28).
3. At the end of the Galilee itinerary, in response to Peter’s “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God”, comes the first anticipative mention of the *Church*; and, with that, the first mention of the *Cross*. (Matt. 16: 18–21).
4. Both the “kingdom” and the King are officially rejected at Jerusalem; and the King is crucified as a blasphemer. (Matt. 27, Mark 14, 15, Luke 23, John. 18, 19).
5. The crucified Jesus rises from the grave, and commissions His disciples to preach among “all nations” a Gospel which now *conjoins* with the “kingdom” message to Israel, glad tidings of *eternal salvation* to “every creature”. (Matt. 28, Mark 16, Luke 24).
6. The Holy Spirit sweeps down on the disciples at Pentecost, and the mighty adventure of the Acts begins. Israel (according to the plain words of the Apostles) is given a further chance to repent and receive the kingdom. (Acts. 2, 3: 12–26).
7. In the first half of the Acts (1–12) the new offer is made to the Jews of the homeland. They reject: and the movement spreads out to the *Gentiles* (8–11). In the second half (13–28) the new message is carried to the Jews of the Dispersion. They reject: and the Acts closes with: “*BE IT KNOWN THEREFORE THAT THE SALVATION OF GOD IS SENT TO THE GENTILES*”.
8. The kingdom offer to Israel, now twice rejected, lapses into silence; and the many local groups, or “assemblies” of believers on the Lord Jesus (mainly Gentile and now known as “Christians”) are divinely revealed to be the first outward units or components of the wonderful new movement of God in *THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST* (Romans—2 Thessalonians).
9. The nine Christian Church Epistles expound, first the full *Gospel* to Jewish and Gentile individuals alike (Romans—Galatians); next the

Church as the hitherto hidden “mystery” (Ephesians—Colossians); then the future *return* of Christ as Bridegroom to translate His completed Church (Thessalonians). To this group the four Pastoral Epistles are appended, with counsels for the teaching and oversight of the churches.

10. Finally, the nine Christian Hebrew Writings elucidate the theological relationship of the Gospel to the religion of Israel—to the Levitical priesthood, sacrifices, and ritual. Then the whole is completed by a final *APOCALYPSE* unveiling the end of the present age, the coming of the Messianic Kingdom at last, in world-wide splendour; and the consummation of the race’s history.

However enigmatic or curious many of the symbols in the Apocalypse may be, its main movements and meanings are so clear that no expert deciphering of detail is required before we can grasp the big, central, supreme message. Everything leads to, and gathers round, and issues from, *three enthronements of Christ*.

1. The enthronement of Christ *in heaven*—*during the present age* (5: 1–14)
2. The enthronement of Christ *on earth*—*during the Millennium* (11: 15, 19: 16–20: 4)
3. The enthronement of Christ *universal*—*throughout the “ages to come”* (22: 1–5)

Without trying to pry open its more elusive symbols, let us allow the book to talk to us through its bolder features and controlling ideas.

First Movement (chapters 1 to 5)

First, it is clear that chapters 1 to 5 belong together and form one, integral movement, leading up to the enthronement of Christ in heaven.

Chapter *Vision:* the Son of Man amid the seven lamp-stands.
1. *Meaning:* Christ in heaven operating through the churches on earth.

Chapters *Letters:* to the seven churches of Asia. *Meaning:* the

- 2 and 3. churches on earth functioning for Christ in heaven.
- Chapter 4. *Vision*: the throne of God; utter splendour; awe-inspiring holiness; lamps of fire, seraphs, adoring worship; glory to God as Creator.
- Chapter 5. *Vision*: Jesus, as “Lion of Judah” and “Root of David” and “Lamb slain” and “Worthy One”, is seated in the very throne of the Deity, angels and all other creatures ascribing glory to “Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever”.

The thing to grasp is, that before the Apocalypse can move onward to show us what is going to happen on earth *in the future*, it must needs show us the risen and ascended Lord Jesus already on that throne of supreme control in heaven *at the present*. He is the controller and dispenser of all that is permitted and directed to the end of time. It is a vivid endorsement of our Lord’s resurrection announcement: “All authority is given unto Me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28: 18).

Let there be no doubt that Revelation 5 teaches our Lord’s *present* enthronement there. Many parts of the Apocalypse belong to the future, but this belongs to the present. That is why our Lord’s last word to the seven churches was: “Even as I also overcame, and *am* [i.e. now] set down with my Father in His throne” (3: 21).

Second Movement (chapters 6 to 19)

But as soon as the Lamb is shown enthroned in heaven, the Apocalypse moves on through the two shock-epochs of the “great tribulation” and the “wrath of God”. The *earthly* view of them runs through chapters 6 to 11. The *heavenly* view of them follows, in chapters 12 to 19. Those two files of chapters travel side by side, concurrent and *parallel*. We need not detail the parallel here; but how do they both end? They end with the Lord Jesus enthroned *here on earth* in millennial world-rule.

“And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying: The kingdoms of this world are become *THE*

KINGDOM OF OUR LORD AND OF HIS CHRIST; AND HE SHALL REIGN UNTO THE AGES OF THE AGES . . .” (11: 15).

“And I saw the heaven opened; and behold a white horse, and He that sat thereon, called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He doth judge and make war . . . And upon His head are many diadems . . . *KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS*. . . . And I saw the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus . . . and they lived and *REIGNED WITH CHRIST* a thousand years” (19: 11–16; 20: 4).

So, just as the issue of the first movement was the enthronement of Christ in *heaven*; the issue of this second movement is the enthronement of Christ on *earth*.

Third Movement (chapters 21–22)

The third and last part of the Apocalypse begins: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away” (21: 1). Immediately following this comes a photographic description of the “New Jerusalem” as the queen city of a renewed and reorganized earth amid a new outer space environment (21: 2–27). To what does that description lead? It leads to this, in chapter 22—

“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of *THE THRONE OF GOD AND OF THE LAMB*.”

See here the enthronement of our dear Lord, the glorious “Lamb of God”, the Redeemer, as co-equal, joint-Sovereign with the Eternal Father in the never-fading, holy splendour of that “New Jerusalem”. Then see what follows, in verses 3 to 5.

“And there shall be no more curse; but *THE THRONE OF GOD AND OF THE LAMB* shall be in it. And His servants shall serve Him: and they shall see His face: and His name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no

candle neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall *REIGN FOR EVER AND EVER*.”

That is the issue to each of the three main apocalyptic movements: the enthronement of the Lamb—first in *heaven*, then here on *earth*, and then throughout *eternity*.

We have shown elsewhere that the central emphasis of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, is on the *sovereignty* of God—unforgettably objectified through the four tremendous events of part one (1–11), and the four elect patriarchs in part two (12–50). And now the Apocalypse, the *last* oracle of the Bible, exhibits that same absolute sovereignty sublimatedly expressing itself in these three enthronements of the *LAMB*. Think of it!—the “*LAMB*”, the meek, gentle, guileless unoffending *LAMB*; the bruised, broken, unresisting “*LAMB THAT WAS SLAIN*” (5: 12) is crowned and enthroned as *KING OF THE NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH*—as the utter, all-eclipsing, everlasting guarantee to all worlds and all creatures, that the sovereignty of God is an all-supreme government of *HOLY LOVE*!

Each book of the Bible has its own way of talking to us, if we take time to hear. The Holy Spirit has His own pattern and purpose in every one of them. And through them all He leads us to *JESUS*. Throughout the Old Testament there is the hope of His *coming*. Throughout the New Testament there is the hope of His *second* coming. Throughout the Millennium there will be the hope of His future reign in the “*New Jerusalem*”. Then, at last, as Paul says, “when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away” (1 Cor. 13: 10).

Amid that “new heaven and new earth” there will *still* be hope; but it will be hope sublimated in a context of ineffable fulfilment. There will be a continual coronation of sinless, lovely aspirations; a succession of glad sunrises without one sunset of frustration. With every hope realised, glowing new expectancies will be kindled in the heart. We cannot enjoy all heaven at once! We cannot meet all the millions and millions of other saved and glorified believers in a mere million years! We cannot exhaust fellowship with the countless myriads of saints and angels even in a million aions! Let the latest telescope tell us that it will take eternity to explore the universe! There can never be a dull moment! With sinless hearts, raptured minds, perfected powers, new faculties and superiorities unimaginable now,

and in cloudless fellowship with the infinitely dear Saviour who redeemed us, we shall dwell in pure ecstasy through the “ages to come”.

What a hope! What a prospect! What a salvation! What an unspeakably wonderful, glorious, precious *SAVIOUR*! “Amen: Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

We sing a hope supreme,
Outlasting death and time;
Its never-ending vistas gleam
With prospects all-sublime:
A heaven of perfect love
Is ours through saving grace;
We yet shall drink of joys above
Before our Saviour’s face.

Our risen Lord is there,
Amid those mansions bright;
He said He would our place prepare
In that fair land of light:
When beats no more the heart,
And these frail bodies die;
In sweet release we then depart
To dwell with Him on high.

Oh, who shall tell the bliss
Where such pure raptures burn?
And yet our hope is more than this;
We look for Christ’s return!
Our Lord shall reappear,
And sleeping ones arise,
And we, transfigured, who remain
Shall join them in the skies!

Our Lord’s millennial reign
On earth we then shall share;
As King of all, the Lamb once slain
Shall bless men everywhere:

Then on, beyond all thought,
Through ages—perfect bliss!
Oh may we count the “world” as nought
For such a hope as this!

AND “NOW THE GOD OF HOPE
FILL YOU WITH ALL JOY AND PEACE
IN BELIEVING, THAT YE MAY
ABOUND IN HOPE THROUGH THE
POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT”

(Rom. 15: 13)